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BUCK FARLEY, THE BONANZA PRINCE;

Or, THE ROMANCE OF DEATH GULCH.

BY EDWARD WILLETT,
AUTHOR OF "MISSISSIPPI MOSE," ETC., ETC.



HE WAS AWAKENED BY THE FLAPPING OF HEAVY WINGS.

Buck Farley, The Bonanza Prince;

OR,

The Romance of Death Gulch.

BY EDWARD WILLETT.

CHAPTER I. THE TRYST.

A LARGE and low house, with a veranda all around it, commanded an almost unequalled prospect.

Toward the east and south, as far as the eye could see, stretched an unbroken prairie, the range of thousands of cattle, the property of the owner of the ranch.

At the west rose giant mountains, the backbone of a continent, verdurous at the base, while the peaks that seemed to touch the sky were covered with eternal snow.

At the north the prairie was rolling and broken, where the foot-hills of the mountain range trended to the eastward, and at the distance of half a mile from the house was a belt of heavy timber, stretching from east to west, marking the course of a creek that finally lost itself in a deep ravine.

It was near the close of day. The sun was setting behind the western mountains, tinging their tall peaks with hues of crimson and purple and violet, and sending a shadow across the prairie until it nearly reached the house that crowned a gentle slope.

A young girl came out of the house, and stood on the veranda that faced the west. She seemed to be a girl of seventeen, and was noticeable for her abundant black hair, her large dark eyes, and the rich beauty of her perfect face. On her head she wore a straw hat with a single pink ribbon, and her simple dress of light material was short in the skirt, so that it should not interfere with her freedom of movement.

She looked up at the shining mountain peaks, then down at the shadow that was slowly stretching over the prairie, and then glanced to the left and to the right, as if to make sure that she was not watched.

A glad light came into her eyes as they finally rested on the belt of timber where it was completely covered by the shadow of the mountains. Then she stepped down from the veranda, and swiftly and silently walked toward the line of the cottonwoods, occasionally casting a stealthy and hurried glance backward.

She had nearly reached her apparent destination, when the door of the house was again opened, and a woman came out.

This woman presented a strange contrast to the girl. She looked to be fully forty years of age, and was of so stout a build that she might fairly have been called fat. Her black hair was thickly streaked with gray, and her full face was dark and unprepossessing. She was dressed with remarkable richness for that region so far from society and civilization, wearing a heavy black satin, expensively made and trimmed, and an abundance of showy jewelry.

She waddled, rather than walked, out on the veranda, and shaded her small eyes with her fat hand from the last rays of the setting sun, as she looked across the prairie.

Suddenly a darker shade came over her dark face, and an exclamation of anger, in the Spanish tongue, escaped her lips.

"Leon!" she called, stamping her foot, "Leon, I say! Bring me my lorgnette!"

A lithe and active boy, nearly as dark as an Indian, came running out at her call, and handed her a small field glass.

She raised it to her eyes, and focused it quickly on the belt of timber, just as the girl was disappearing among the trees.

"I thought so," she said. "There is no time to be lost. Leon, bring your master to me. Bring Senor Rosalba to me at once. At once, I say!"

The boy hastened away, but soon returned with a tall and shapely man, who was in appearance several years younger than the woman who had sent for him. He, too, was dark and swarthy; but his eyes, strangely contrasting with his hair and complexion, were of a light gray, and his face was nearly covered by a thick black beard. He was dressed rather richly, partly in Mexican and partly in American style, his embroidered jacket and broad sombrero speaking of the former nationality, and his tweed trousers of the latter. In his right hand he carried a heavy whip with a long lash.

"*Cara mia*," he said, with a smile that could scarcely be seen through his heavy mustache, "what is the matter with my angel? What troubles you now, Lucia?"

"That girl," she said, frowning as she pointed toward the belt of timber. "Rose has gone yonder. She left the house a little while ago, and of course she has gone to meet that Yankee, Ned Dorlon."

"*Caramba!*" exclaimed Senor Rosalba. "That must be attended to."

"At once and forever, Pedro."

"At once and forever, *Lucetta mia*. It shall trouble you no more."

The girl, in the meantime, looked neither to the left nor to the right after she had entered the cottonwoods, but followed the stream toward the west, looking straight before her, and eagerly exploring the spaces where the tall trees threw dark and fantastic shadows. There was no fear in her look, and no uncertainty in her step, nothing in her aspect or her action but hope and glad expectancy of a coming pleasure.

At last a joyful cry burst from her lips, as a young man stepped out from the shadow of a large trunk, and rapidly approached her.

Beyond doubt this was the "Yankee" of whom Senor Rosalba had spoken. He had the fair hair and blue eyes of the northern race, and his speech and actions proved him to be an American of the Americans. He was a little above the average height of man, and his muscular but symmetrical form spoke of strength and agility. A light mustache adorned his frank and handsome countenance, and his fair brow was shaded by a wide felt hat. His blue flannel shirt, and the tall boots that half-covered his legs, suggested the ranchman or prospector, and the rest of his clothing was plain and serviceable.

"Rose!" he exclaimed, as he hastened to meet her. "Have you really come, my darling? I scarcely dared to expect you."

She held out both her hands as she joined him, and they met with a close and fervent embrace.

"Of course I have come, Edward," she said. "How could I keep away?"

"I was afraid that you would be kept away," he replied, "and I am still afraid that you are preparing trouble for yourself by coming here to meet me. Have you no such fear?"

She answered him by a loving look, and again she embraced, closely and fervently.

Clearly this was a love affair that must be put an end to at once, if it was to be stopped at all.

"I have no fear when I can be with you," she said. "Then I forget everything else, and only know that I love you. But I have been cautious, dear one. I slipped away from the house when no one was looking, and I came to the creek so swiftly that I must have escaped even the watchful eyes of my mother."

"If she should suspect that we are still meeting," said Dorlon, "I am afraid that she would take severe measures with you; and you know that your father hates me."

"My father?" exclaimed Rose. "You are mistaken, Edward. Senor Rosalba is not my father."

"Not your father, sweetheart? I do not understand."

"I am an American, as you are. In spite of my dark eyes and my Mexican face, I am an American, through my father, and my name is not Rosalba, though it is long since I have been known by any other."

"Who, then, was your father, Rose? and what is your name?"

"His name was Warren, Henry Warren. My mother married him for his riches, but hated him because he was an American. It is hard to speak of my mother as I do, and to feel toward her as I do; but it is right to tell the truth. When my father settled here, and built the house yonder, he made Pedro Rosalba, to please my mother, the superintendent of his cattle farm. Years ago, when I was but an infant my father rode away to buy some cattle, and he never returned. I remember that I asked what had become of him, and that they told me that nobody knew, and that my mother laughed at me when I cried after him. Then my mother married Pedro Rosalba, and now he is lord and master here."

"This place must be hateful to you, my darling, and I am sure that Senor Rosalba is not kind to you."

"He would be, if I would marry his nephew, Manuel Vincente; but they all know that I detest that cruel, sneering scoundrel, and it is on his account that they treat me harshly. No person here is kind to me, except my young step-brother, Benito Rosalba, and what can he do for me, the poor hunchback?"

"There is one who can do something for you, Rose. I can at least take you away from these hateful associations, and from the daily fears that oppress you here. Fly with me, dear one, and become my wife, and I will do my best to make your life a happy one."

The girl turned her gaze upon the ground, and her eyes filled with tears.

"I would gladly do so," she said; "but it does not seem to be possible. I am afraid that the attempt would end only in death for you and torture for me. Senor Rosalba rules all this region, as far as our eyes can see, and you are poor and friendless. If I should be missed from home, his horsemen would quickly scour all the country around here, and we would have no chance to escape them. We could not even hope for such a pleasant fate as that which befell Lord Ullin's daughter and her lover."

"It is true that I am poor," replied Dorlon;

"but I am not friendless, though my friends are few and far apart in this region. I believe that I can find a hiding-place, which we could reach before they could overtake us, and where we would be safe from discovery until we might find means of getting far from here."

"Do you really believe, Edward, that we could get safely away?"

"I am sure of it. Wait a little while; have patience a little longer; and I'll make such arrangements as will carry us beyond the reach of Pedro Rosalba and all the men he can put on our track. Then will you go with me, darling?"

"Yes, Edward. When you are sure that you can make the attempt safely, so that it shall not lead to your death, I will go with you gladly—to the world's end, if need be."

"You will go nowhere, young woman," said a harsh voice close behind her, and at the same moment a heavy hand was laid on Edward Dorlon's shoulder.

CHAPTER II.

DEATH GULCH.

DORLON turned quickly, and was confronted by the bearded face and gleaming gray eyes of Pedro Rosalba.

He started backward, to shake off the grasp that had been laid on his shoulder, but was at once seized by three pairs of hands, and in a few seconds, in spite of his struggles, his arms were securely bound behind his back.

Rose tried to reach him, but was seized and forcibly restrained by Senor Rosalba.

She sunk upon the ground and clasped the knees of her mother's husband, entreating pitifully for her lover.

"Spare him!" she exclaimed, while the tears rained down her face. "He has done no harm. It was all my fault. Kill me if you will, but spare him! In the name of the Mother of Christ, I pray you to spare him!"

"Yes, surely, I will spare him," replied her step-father. "I do not know of any one who can better be spared. You must learn to spare him, too, as you will miss him hereafter."

At these cruel words her tears burst forth afresh.

"Ask no favors of him, Rose," said young Dorlon. "You might as well hope to move yonder mountains with your prayers. But I warn you, Pedro Rosalba, and those who are with you, that you had better think twice about whatever it is that you propose to do. You are mistaken if you suppose me to be friendless. If I am missing, there are those who will inquire about me, and who are able and willing to take vengeance upon you for any wrong you may do me."

Senor Rosalba laughed, and his laugh was harsh and merciless.

"I do not care the snapping of my finger," he said, "for you and all your friends, if you have any. Your threats have not the weight of a feather. Take him away, *amigos!*"

Rose staggered to her feet, and again stretched out her hands in entreaty.

"Answer me one word," she begged. "What do you mean to do with him? Tell me—oh, in mercy tell me that you do not mean to kill him!"

"I will tell you no lie," coldly replied the Mexican. "The accursed Gringo shall die. Within an hour his flesh will feed the buzzards and wolves!"

With a cry she sunk upon the ground, pale as death and seemingly lifeless.

Edward Dorlon struggled to reach her; but, bound and held, he could scarcely move from his tracks.

"You cowardly brute!" he exclaimed. "You have killed her. You shall yet suffer for this."

"It is nothing to you," sneeringly replied Rosalba. "At least it will be nothing to you in an hour from now."

"Shall I not take her to the house, uncle Pedro?" asked one of those who were holding Dorlon—a tall, heavily-built, low-browed and sullen-featured young man.

"No, Manuel. Leave her alone, and let her come to her senses when she will. There is but one cure for such a case as hers. Bring on that fine bit of buzzard bait."

The Mexican led the way, and Dorlon was partly led and partly dragged through the timber toward the west.

About fifteen minutes after they had left the spot, two others came to where Rose was lying senseless under the cottonwoods.

One was the boy, Leon, who had come so quickly at Senor Rosalba's call. The other was a youth, perhaps a little older than Leon, but hardly so tall, whose distorted form marked him as the hunchbacked step-brother of whom Rose had spoken to young Dorlon. His face, darkly pale, was by no means handsome; but there was a human expression in his soft eyes, that told of a gentle and loving soul. He walked with a cane, and was almost breathless when his crooked limbs had brought him to the spot where the girl lay.

"Poor Rose!" he exclaimed, as he knelt on the ground at her side. "My sweet sister! What have they done to you! God help us, Leon! She is dead!"

As the other lad bent down and gazed intently at the lifeless face, the girl's eyes opened, and her lips parted.

"She is not dead, Benito," said Leon.

Both of them raised her in their arms, and she shuddered as she looked around.

"What does this mean?" she feebly muttered. "Oh, Benito, is it you? They have taken him away."

"Who has been taken away, dear Rose? Is it Dorlon?"

"Yes, it is Dorlon. They have taken him away to kill him."

"Which way did they go?"

She could only shake her head sadly.

"I can guess," said Benito, as he rose to his feet with the help of his cane. "They have gone to Death Gulch. I will follow them, dear Rose, and I will try to save him."

Her eyes thanked him; but her hopeless face told him that she had no faith in his success.

"Stay with her, Leon! Take her to the house as soon as she is able to walk. Have no fear for me, Rose. I will do my best."

The hunchback hobbled away as fast as his infirm limbs could carry him with the help of his cane.

Dorlon's captors in the mean time had taken him about half a mile further through the timber toward the west. Then they lifted him in their arms, waded the stream, set him down on the other side of the creek, and pursued a northward course over the broken prairie.

The man who was doomed to death walked among them, one at each side, one behind him, and Pedro Rosalba leading the way.

He did not speak to them, as he knew well that neither entreaties nor threats would avail to prevent their foul purpose. His face was pale in the growing darkness; but his eye did not quail, and his lips were closed firmly as he walked with steady steps to certain death.

Nor did his executioners care to use their tongues. They no longer reviled or taunted him, and said nothing of the fate that was in store for him. Even to them there was something awful in their errand, and Pedro Rosalba found no brutal jests ready to raise the spirits of his comrades. They looked neither at their prisoner nor at each other, and even forbore to curse when the broken ground betrayed their footsteps.

Thus they silently pursued their northward course, as swiftly as the difficulties of the way would allow, until they reached the edge of a chasm, where the ground, for the space of several acres, seemed to have sunk in some awful convulsion of nature, leaving an oblong space in which nothing but darkness was visible.

Edward Dorlon was no stranger to the place, for it was known far and wide as Death Gulch, and its reputation was that of a bottomless pit. At noontime, when the sun was shining, trees and rocks could be distinguished for a considerable distance down its dark sides; but further down there were depths that no eye could penetrate at any time or in any light. A stone cast far out from the edge gave back no sound when it descended, and it was the current belief of the white men, as it was the tradition of the red-men, that its depth could not be sounded.

No living thing that had fallen into that fearful chasm had ever been known to emerge from its secret recesses, and the spot was avoided even in daylight by men and beasts, as if there was danger in approaching it.

The moon, then near the full, had risen, and was shining brilliantly in an almost cloudless sky, silvering the broad prairie at the east, and lighting up the rocks and gullies near the chasm; but the brightness of the moonlight only served to make deeper and more intense the darkness of Death Gulch.

As Dorlon and his captors stood near the brink of that black abyss, their faces pale and unearthly under the stars, he knew the fate to which the cruelty of Pedro Rosalba and the mean jealousy of Manuel Vincente had doomed him; but he did not flinch, and he disdained to sue for mercy.

At a sign from the Mexican his legs were tied at the ankles, but he was left standing.

Then for the first time since he had left the spot where Rose lay lifeless on the ground, he opened his lips to speak.

He looked upon the four men who stood about him, and they shrunk from his gaze.

"I know you all," he said—"you, Pedro Rosalba; you, Manuel Vincente; you, Bill Saunders; and you, Mike Rafferty. I know what you mean to do, and that there is no escape for me. But I warn you all that from this night henceforth you will be marked men. You shall yet pay the debt you owe me, and, living or dead, I will be on hand for the settlement. Now do your worst!"

The four men actually trembled. There was an impressiveness in the words of their victim that struck fear to the depths of their brutal natures.

"Bah!" exclaimed Rosalba, with a harsh and forced laugh. "The fellow talks like a fool. Seize him, amigos! Swing him off, and let him tell his story to the dead!"

They lifted the helpless man with their hands, Rosalba and his nephew at the shoulders, and

the others at his legs; and thus they held him, with his feet pointing toward the black abyss.

At that moment Benito, exhausted by his exertions, and almost breathless, struggled toward them.

"Father!" he cried, "what are you doing? Do not kill that man! For God's sake—for my sake—do not kill him!"

"Get away from here!" said Rosalba, turning a frowning face upon the deformed lad. "Go back as you came, or I will whip you like a dog!"

"Do not kill him!" cried Benito again. "It is murder!"

He had scrambled up the side of a gully, and was within reach of them, his pale face upturned to the moonlight, and his eyes streaming with tears.

With an oath the Mexican raised his foot, without losing his hold on Dorlon's shoulder, and fiercely spurned the lad. Benito fell backward into the gully, and lay there, breathless and bleeding.

"Now, my lads," said Rosalba, "let us make an end of this. Swing him as I count."

"One—swing!"

"Two—swing!"

"Three—go!"

At the word "Go!" their helpless victim was shot out over the edge of the abyss, and fell down into the darkness. His executioners looked and listened, but neither saw nor heard anything more.

CHAPTER III.

DOWN IN THE DEPTHS.

EDWARD DORLON involuntarily closed his eyes when he was let loose from the murderous hands that had swung him, and held his breath as he went downward.

He was keenly alive to the sensation of falling, and only wondered whether the breath would be out of his body before he reached the bottom of Death Gulch, if that fearful chasm had any bottom.

He did not fall to the bottom, and the breath was not driven out of his body by his rapid descent.

That side of Death Gulch was not perpendicular, as it was generally supposed to be, and the strength of his four executioners was not sufficient to send him clear of its shelving slope.

Far below the spot from which he had been shot forth, a tall cedar tree sent its trunk upward toward the sunlight, and its top, flat, broad, and with many green and robust branches, spread out there as if it had grown with the one purpose of catching that doomed man in its strong embrace.

It was a fearful fall, but not a killing one. Thanks to his precaution in holding his breath, it was still in his body when he struck the tree, and the shock caused him to open his mouth and take in an ample supply of air.

He fell with great violence, and crashed down through the branches of the tree, doubling up his body, and bruising and tearing his flesh severely; but finally the resistance of the cedar limbs overcame the impetus of his fall, and he descended no further.

Then he rested, if the cessation of motion could be called rest. He found himself doubly helpless. Not only was he bound hand and foot, but he lay in such an awkward position, and had been so roughly handled by contact with the tree, that it was torture to him to attempt to move. Yet he was alive, and the thought was a comfort to him, whatever fate the near future might hold in store.

So he rested, or at least remained quiet, until he had regained possession of his senses, and a fair portion of his strength had returned to him.

Then he endeavored, with such feeble means as he was able to use, to ascertain his exact position, and to cast about for a way of escape from the peril that was so painfully pressing him.

The darkness that enveloped him was more intense than that of any night he had ever experienced. It was an utter and absolute blackness, that hemmed him in and pressed upon him until it seemed as if it would smother him. By no straining of the eyes could he possibly see anything, and the cords that so tightly bound his arms and wrists prevented him from using those useful members, his hands, for feeling.

Yet he could feel. The sensations of his body, painful and otherwise, could give him some indication of his position, and his fingers were partly free.

Concentrating his mind upon the point of discovery, he concluded that he was lying across two branches of the tree, and perceived that his shoulders were higher than the rest of his body. He must be near the place where the branches left the tree, or they would be spread so far apart as to let him fall through. To test this matter he wormed himself inward, though at the risk of falling, until he could touch the trunk with his head.

His next discovery was that he was also lying on a portion of a bent branch, that had been crushed downward by his weight. Feeling it as well as he could with his fingers, he came

across a fractured piece of wood, where one of the side shoots had been broken from the bent branch. It was rough and jagged, and the thought occurred to him that he had a use for it.

Above all things it was necessary that he should get his hands free, and this ragged piece of wood at least offered him a chance. As he could feel it with his fingers, it was not a very difficult matter to move his body so that the cord that bound his wrists should come in contact with it, and then he would try what friction and patience would do.

When he had succeeded in getting the cord against the broken wood, he moved his arms up and down with the action of sawing. He had little play for them, bound as they were, but that little was sufficient for his purpose, if it could be accomplished in any way.

Bruised and sore as his body was, and in his strained position, the labor was tiresome and painful; but he persevered, as that was his only chance of safety. It was a serious question which would wear out first, the cord or the broken wood; but time would tell, and there was at least a little hope to cheer him as he worked.

It was his exhausted nature that first gave way. Even as he was rubbing the cord against the wood, he fell asleep, and slept soundly.

He was awakened by the flapping of heavy wings. A buzzard, in the gray light of dawn, had spied him sleeping in the branches of the cedar, had supposed him to be a corpse, and had come down to feast on him. But his opening eyes stayed the flight of the foul bird, and his hoarse cry scared it away.

It flew upward, waiting patiently, and he knew what it was waiting for.

This incident fully roused him to a sense of his situation, and again he set at work to rub the cord against the broken wood. It was a tiresome and almost hopeless task, and at times he rested from it, nearly ready to despair, doubting if he had not better twist himself loose from the branches that held him, and accept whatever fate his fall would give him.

But again and again he renewed the task with the energy of despair, and at last the loosening of the cord at his wrist told him that it had given way!

The relief from the long strain was so great that he nearly swooned; but again he roused himself to exertion, and endeavored to get rid of the cord. Fortunately for him, only one fold had been tied, and he was able to shake it off.

His hands were free, and that meant a chance for life.

He gradually brought them around in front of his body, and rubbed his arms until the blood flowed freely through them, and strength returned to them. Then it was an easy matter to cast off the lashings that bound his feet, and a thrill of joy ran through him as he knew that he was master of himself.

There was a faint light down there in the top of the cedar, which was gradually growing stronger. Looking upward, he saw red streaks in the sky, which told him that day was breaking.

He took his watch from his pocket, and held it to his ear. To his surprise, it was still running, and he hastened to wind it. Its lively ticking seemed to tell him that he was not done with time.

He secured upon his person the cords with which he had been bound, and prepared to go down further into the depths, as it was clearly impossible to ascend the gulch.

It was an easy matter to descend the tree as far as the branches went, and then he slid down to its base. The latter part of the descent did not lack much of being a fall, and when he reached the ground his breath was nearly gone, and his hands and arms were blistered.

When he had rested, he arose and looked around, and found himself on a narrow ledge. In the uncertain light he saw something lying near him on the flat rock, and he stooped to examine it. It proved to be the clothes and skeleton of a man, from which the flesh had been picked clean by buzzards.

Overcoming a strong repugnance, he examined the clothing for weapons, and found a revolver and a bowie-knife, scarcely rusted, and a belt of cartridges, all of which he secured upon his own person.

Evidently he did not believe that his lease of life had run out.

There was another thing that he found there—a long lariat of rawhide, coiled, and in good condition, and this he seized eagerly.

Then he stepped to the edge of the rock, and looked down into the chasm.

Daylight had not yet penetrated the remotest depths of the gulch; but he could see, at a considerable distance below him, the top of another tall cedar, and he thought that with the aid of the lariat he might be able to reach it.

He dropped an end of the pliable rope down the face of the cliff, and strained his eyes to watch it as it swung, but was sure that it did not reach the tree.

This fault he proceeded to remedy at once. He had saved the cords, with which he had

been bound, and had good reason to know that they were strong. He carefully spliced them together—he had been a sailor in his boyhood—and knotted them to the lariat, one end of which he secured to a point of rock, with as little waste of rope as possible.

Letting the line down again, he swung himself off from the ledge, and trusted to the chances of descent, climbing down the rope, hand under hand, until he reached its end. It was hard work grasping the slim line and holding up his own weight. His sinews had been strained to the utmost, and—what had he gained?

Turning his eyes downward, he saw that the top of the tree was still at a considerable distance below him—it might be twenty, thirty, or even fifty feet—distance being only guesswork in that twilight.

But he could not return, and must soon drop, with his will or against it, and he hoped that he could drop safely into the top of the cedar. He had already fallen into one tree, from a greater distance, and when he was bound and helpless, so that he fell like a log. Surely his chances were much better for this venture.

There was nothing else for it, and he let go! As he had the full use of his senses, as well as of his arms and legs, it was only at the expense of a few more scratches and bruises that he secured a lodgment in the boughs of the cedar.

Again he rested, and then descended the tree to its base, where he carefully observed the position of affairs.

By this time the light of day had penetrated into the chasm below him, and he made a discovery that caused his heart to jump for joy.

Death Gulch was not bottomless!

He could see down there what had the appearance of a valley, and it looked to be green and pleasant, though still in the shadow.

It was on the edge of a rugged slope that he stood—a steep slope, mostly covered with loose stones, with only here and there a projecting piece of rock that afforded a hold for feet or hands.

Such as it was, he must descend it and he began to climb down with the utmost caution. Every now and then his feet would slip, or stones would come rattling down upon him; but he always managed to recover himself and to escape the worst of those small avalanches.

So he continued the dangerous descent, until he was far below the base of the second cedar, and had reached the foot of the slope.

It terminated at another ledge of rock, beneath which the cliff fell away perpendicularly, until it reached a gentler slope, overgrown with trees and other verdure, that stretched down to the valley.

If he could reach the foot of that cliff, he would be safe; but it was quite impossible to climb down, and any attempt to descend could only result in death or a bad case of broken bones.

After all his perils and toils, he had reached this point, only to find his efforts completely foiled. Almost at his terrible journey's end, he was shut off from further progress. So near, and yet so far!

If he only had the rope in which he had let himself down from the ledge above!

It was a vain wish, and he sunk down on the rock in despair. Should he cast himself down headforemost, and seek a speedy death, or await starvation and the buzzards?

Then there came to his ears the incredible sound of a human voice, reaching to him from below, and never was speech more welcome to him than this one word:

"Hello!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE SOLITARY.

EDWARD DORLON sprang to his feet, and eagerly looked over the edge of the cliff.

In the top of a tree below him he saw a living thing, but was obliged to look twice before he could determine whether it was a human being or a beast. It was clothed entirely in skins, and its face was covered with a very heavy growth of gray hair. But the voice told the story.

"Hello!" was shouted again, unmistakably in the voice of a man.

"Hello!" answered Dorlon.

"Are you all right? Any bones broke?"

"All right so far."

"I saw you up there, and came to help you down. If I can throw this line to you, you will soon be set free."

The man had evidently climbed the tree for the purpose of getting nearer to the top of the cliff. He cut away a branch, to give swing to his right hand, which held a coiled lariat of rawhide.

"Stand by to catch it!" he shouted.

At the first throw the line fell short. At the second throw Dorlon caught it. He made it fast to a rock, and quickly descended, hand under hand, reaching the foot of the cliff in time to meet the stranger, who had climbed down the tree.

He was a tall, gaunt, angular man, and his gray hair and beard showed that he was advanced in years. His skin clothing, from which the fur had not been removed, was well made

and fitted; but his hat of the same material was decidedly "queer." It shaded his brows so that nothing of his face was visible where it was not covered by beard, except his nose and eyes.

His eyes sparkled with evident pleasure as he advanced to the man he had rescued, and he held out his hand, which Dorlon grasped.

"I owe you my life," said the young man.

"I have lost my lasso, but have gained a companion," replied the stranger.

Then a shade of trouble came into his eyes, and he looked at the new-comer earnestly.

"Tell me, honestly," he said, "can you understand what I say? Do I speak English?"

"Of course I can understand you," replied Dorlon.

"You speak as well as I do."

"I was not sure. It is so long since I have heard any voice but my own."

"How long have you been here, sir?"

"About twelve years, if my count is right."

"Twelve years!" repeated Dorlon, looking in wonder at the man who had endured solitary confinement in that valley for such a length of time, and at once jumping to the conclusion that he also must be a prisoner for life in the same place.

"Yes, it must be twelve years. A miracle happened then. But here is another miracle. How did you get down here? I did not catch sight of you until you reached the ledge just above us."

"I was bound hand and foot," replied Dorlon, "and was tossed over from the edge of the gulch, ever so far up yonder."

"Merciful Heaven! Who was guilty of that murderous act?"

"How can their names interest you? The leader was a wealthy ranchman, named Pedro Rosalba."

The stranger's eyes gleamed, and he fairly shook with excitement.

"Pedro Rosalba!" he exclaimed. "Does that wretched assassin still live? Has the justice of God not yet overtaken him? Why did he seek to murder you? Did he want your wife and your property?"

"No. I have neither wife nor property. It was I who wanted his daughter."

"Has he a daughter, then?"

"His step-daughter, I should have said—his wife's child by a former husband, who disappeared years ago."

"So Pedro Rosalba married the disconsolate widow, and now rules the ranch. But Rose is living! She must be a woman now."

"She is," replied Dorlon. "But who are you, sir, who know so much about those people?"

"I am Henry Warren, Rose's father, the man who disappeared, and the rightful owner of that property."

Dorlon again grasped the old man's hand.

"What a providence is this!" said he. "You spoke of a miracle. How were you lost and saved?"

"I was waylaid by Pedro Rosalba and his tools, and was thrown down into the gulch as you were, except that I was not bound. I do not want to tell the story. I doubt if I could tell it. It was daytime, and I may have had a better chance than you had; but at this day I can hardly even guess how I got to the bottom of the gulch. But your face is bloody, and your hands are blistered, and I know that you must be sore and tired and hungry. Come with me to my den, where you shall have enough to eat and a chance to rest."

Dorlon followed the old man down the easy descent of the wooded slope. They emerged in a narrow valley, where the grass was abundant and the foliage green and luxuriant. A silvery brook ran down this valley, and all was calm and peaceful. The sun was by this time well up in the sky, and it was light enough at the bottom of Death Gulch, though it was only for a small portion of the day that the rays of sunlight fairly reached its recesses.

It was a pleasant place, if a man could think of it otherwise than as a prison.

"Is there no way to get out of here?" asked the young man.

His companion sadly shook his head.

Dorlon looked up at the lofty walls that shut in the gulch, and decided that the situation was hopeless. The north side was a sheer precipice, with nothing to break its solid front of stone, and as for the south side, by which he had entered—he knew enough of that.

Henry Warren led the young man to a place under the north cliff, where a natural cavern had been so improved by years of slow and patient labor, that Dorlon was surprised to see what a neat and comfortable abode it was.

The rocky floor was covered with skins, and there were several rude articles of furniture, mostly made of roots and gnarled branches of trees, put together with much taste, and in a workmanlike manner. In front of the opening to the cavern a slow fire was burning, and the old man threw on some dry sticks, which soon brought it to a blaze.

Dorlon went down to the brook and washed himself. Then he applied to his bruises and blisters some ointment which the old man gave him.

By this time Mr. Warren had broiled on the coals some slices of venison, and he surprised

his guest by setting before him some wheat cakes, that had been baked in the ashes. This, with a wooden bowl filled with water from the brook, was Dorlon's breakfast, and he ate as if he enjoyed it heartily.

"Where do you get your flour?" he asked.

"I raise my own wheat," replied the old man.

"I will show you my farm after a while."

"As you seem to have a plenty, it is hardly worth while to ask how you manage to live down here."

"It was pretty hard at first, my son, until I learned how to take care of myself, and to make traps and snares. For a while I was obliged to depend on windfalls, and was often on short rations. This gulch, as you must know, is a death-trap. Animals often fall into it, and sometimes they reach the bottom. The first meat I got was a buffalo, butchered in that way, and numbers of cattle have fallen in. Do you see all these skins? They are from windfalls, and I have had many more. There are black-tailed deer down here, and I have tamed them, and there is quite a family of us. In the brook there are plenty of fish, and I can easily catch them. Oh, it is easy enough to live here, and it is not so very hard to live alone, when you have once got used to it. I never expected to see the face of any living human being again, nor did I care much about it; but another miracle has brought you here, and things look different to me already. I am not sure that I would not be glad to get away, if I could."

"Is it quite impossible, then, to get away from here?" asked the young man.

"Quite so, my son—quite so, unless you could fly."

It was such a pleasure to the old man to have somebody to talk to, and he took such an evident delight in the sound of his own voice, that Dorlon let him run on, and gave answers to all his questions concerning Rose, the Rosalbas, the cattle farm, and many matters connected with the upper world, until he could no longer keep awake.

Mr. Warren, noticing his weary eyes, begged his pardon for having fatigued him with so much talk, and prepared for him a couch of skins, and he lay down and slept luxuriously.

When he awoke, the shadow of a long twilight had enveloped the valley, and the old man was preparing their evening meal by a bright fire.

"Where do you get your tools?" asked Dorlon, as he was assisting in this task, and noticed the knife that his host was using.

"I had a bowie and a heavy pocket-knife when I came in, and since then I have found two similar knives on the body of a man who fell over the north cliff. I have been very careful of my knives, and have been dreading the time when they will be used up."

Dorlon said that he had two knives, together with two revolvers and a quantity of cartridges.

"There will be no use for the revolvers," replied the old man, "unless we can find some way of making blades of them; but the knives will be very useful, and will last us, with good care, for—well, a long time."

"A long time!" echoed Dorlon. "Is there no chance at all to get out of this gulch?"

"No chance at all!"

They talked by the light of a wick floating in a dish of deer-fat until a late hour. When Dorlon again laid himself down to sleep, the hopelessness of his situation pressed upon him, and those ominous words, "No chance at all!" kept buzzing in his head.

Would not death, he thought, have been preferable to imprisonment for life?

At last he slept and dreamed of dungeons.

CHAPTER V.

THE SECRET OF GOLD.

THE next morning was a busy one for Edward Dorlon, and he took a real pleasure in life at the bottom of the gulch, as it then opened before him.

He went with the old man to visit the deer, and found them plentiful and quite tame. Unable to escape from the valley, they had become accustomed to the presence of Mr. Warren, and did not fear him. He had begun by petting the fawns, and the entire flock was then gentle and familiar.

The two men caught fish in the brook with hooks made of bone, and lines made of sinews, in the Indian fashion. Then they went to visit Mr. Warren's "farm," and there was a sight for which Dorlon had not been prepared.

At its western end the gulch turned, and the valley extended, with a gentle upward slope, a short distance toward the north. In this pocket, as it may be called, the valley was wider than at any other part of the gulch, and a considerable part of its width was covered with a field of wheat, tall, well-headed and beginning to ripen. There was also quite a field of corn, a patch devoted to the camash plant and sundry vegetables, and an orchard of wild plums. All this was guarded from the deer by a stone fence.

"Where did you get your seed?" asked Dorlon, wondering at what he saw.

"When I was pitched over," replied the old man, "I happened to have in my pocket a package of wheat that had been sent to me from Washington for trial. The other seeds I have mostly found in the stomachs of cattle that have fallen into this death-trap. The camash and the plum grow wild; but I have improved them by cultivation."

Dorlon wondered how sunshine, sufficient to ripen the grain, could find its way down there.

"The farm gets a good dose of sunshine in the afternoon," said Mr. Warren. "Wait a little while and you will see it."

They waited, and soon the portion of the valley inclosed by the stone fence was flooded with sunlight.

"I will show you where that comes from," said the old man, and he led his friend around to what was at that point the western side of the gulch, where a strange spectacle was presented to their sight.

From near the foot of the cliff there was a broad opening, leading upward at a steep slope, further than the eye could follow it. The opening was similar to that which might have been left by a land-slide, except that it was of stone, nearly as smooth as a lumber slide. At the middle of this wide trough was a deep depression, worn by the action of water, down which a clear brook was then running with the velocity of a waterfall.

"A splendid water-privilege," remarked Dorlon.

But it was not only admiration of the wonders of nature that caused him to examine that strange break in the cliff so closely.

"Is there no chance to get out by that chute?" he asked.

"Of course there is not," replied the old man. "You might as well think of trying to climb a rainbow, and if we could get to the top, would we then be anywhere?"

"We would at least be out of here."

"You are crazy on the subject of getting out, my son. I was so for some time, until I settled down. I have studied that matter for years, and there is no chance."

Dorlon was not convinced.

"You would not have believed that we could get in here alive," he said. "Would it be any greater wonder if we should get out?"

When they had eaten their supper of fish, they leaned back on the piles of skins in the cavern, and smoked, in pipes that Warren had made of the valley clay, a dried weed that was a fair substitute for tobacco.

"As far as living is concerned," said Dorlon, "there is but one thing needed down here, and that is salt."

"I do feel the lack of salt," replied the old man, "but have got on without it, and have been healthy. There is a good deal of value in this gulch. If we could get out of here, my son, we need never need for anything that money can buy."

"What do you mean?" asked Dorlon.

"Come with me, and I will show you."

The old man took his deer-fat lamp, and led the way to the back part of the cavern. There he drew aside a pile of skins, and disclosed a hole in the rock, that was full of nuggets of gold.

Dorlon knelt down and examined the "pile," freely expressing his delight and amazement.

"I don't know why I keep that stuff hid, down here where there is nobody to steal it," said Warren. "I suppose it must be because of my remembrance of the world of thieves I used to live in. I don't know why I have taken the trouble to gather it, either, unless I did it for pastime, as the gold is of no use at all in this valley. I would gladly give the whole of it for a barrel of salt."

"That would be a costly barrel of salt," remarked Dorlon. "Where does the gold come from?"

"I have picked up those nuggets along the brook, and washed them out of the sand. They come from a vein at the head of the gulch, and such a vein! I will show it to you in the morning."

As soon as the light would allow, they went to the head of the gulch, where the brook, in its headlong tumble into the chasm had cut a channel in the face of the rocky cliff.

"Do you know anything about rocks and mining, my son?" asked the old man.

"I have had some experience as a miner and as a mining engineer."

"What do you think of that, then, as a gold-bearing rock?"

Mr. Warren pointed upward at the channel worn by the water, and Dorlon examined the face of the cliff closely. The brook had evidently cut a large vein of quartz, and the young man saw, or fancied he could see, bright streaks of gold in the rock.

"There is gold in that rock, and plenty of it," he said.

"Yes; the nuggets that have washed out prove that. Can you make out the track of the vein, and judge what it amounts to?"

"I believe I can. I am willing to bet that I could go, if I were out of this place, right to where it crops out at the surface of the earth. I am inclined to believe, too, that the vein we

see, big as it is, is only a branch of a bigger vein. There is wealth enough in that rock to make both of us billionaires."

"But it will never be of any use to us as long as we live," sadly replied the old man.

"I am not so sure of that as you seem to be. We must get out of this place."

"That is just what I said when I began to find the gold. I was crazy to get out of the gulch. But I quieted down in time, and gave it up."

Still Dorlon was not convinced. He was young, and was not disposed to believe in impossibilities. He looked up at the cliff and the channel cut by the water, and his gaze finally settled on the brook that ran through the valley.

"It is not easy to discourage me," he said, "and I am not ready to believe that we are shut up in this hole for life. It would be possible, if our tools could hold out, to cut steps in that slide that lets in the sunshine."

"I have thought of that," replied the old man, "and have given it up long since. Our tools would not carry us far. Even if you could get to the top of the slide, where would you be then?"

"As I said before, we would at least be out of here. But there is another point. This brook is quite a stream, and I have noticed other brooks below, some of which feed it, and some do not. There must be a great deal of water that has to get out of this place, especially in the rainy season. Where is the outlet?"

"I have told you, my son, that the water sinks into the ground down yonder at the foot of the gulch."

"Let us go there; I want to see the place where it sinks into the ground."

"Come on, then. But you needn't be in such a hurry. You have lots of time before you—years of them, if you live and endure them—and it will not be long before you settle down as I have done."

But Dorlon felt no such misgivings at the moment. A new idea had seized him, and he was eager to follow it up and know what it would lead to. He saw only one impossibility, and that was that he should be doomed to waste his young life in that gulch, when a fortune lay within his grasp.

He hastened down the valley, hurrying the tardy footsteps of the old man and noting as he went the rivulets that fed the main stream, until they reached the foot of the gulch.

There the place where the water sunk into the ground was plainly visible. The brook suddenly dropped into a dark hole, at the distance of a few rods from the cliff, and that was all that could be seen.

But it was possible that something more might be heard.

Dorlon lay down on the ground, with his ear over the hole, and listened, while his companion shook his head sadly, though an amused smile rested on his face.

The young man arose from the ground with a bright look of satisfaction.

"This is better than I had hoped for," he said.

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Warren.

"I can plainly hear the water roaring down there, and am convinced that there is a large volume of it. The stream that comes down the slide yonder—where does that empty?"

"That, also, sinks into the ground, a little way beyond here."

The young man went to the other sink, where he looked and listened for a while. Then he returned to the principal hole, which he examined more carefully than before.

"Just as I thought," he said. "There is no such roaring at the other hole as I find here, and I have no doubt that this is the main sink, where all the water of the valley is collected, and from which it passes away."

"Well, and what of that?" asked Mr. Warren.

"Just this—as the other sinks are merely feeders of this one, there must be a pretty large body of water below us here. It would be absurd to say that it drops down to the middle of the earth, or that it sinks away and is lost. We have a right to suppose that it finds an outlet into some lower valley, and that it has bored a hole for its passage through the cliff. That hole is bound to be a big one, and it is quite likely that it may let us out, as well as the water. As this water sinks down into the earth, I propose that we follow it until we reach the place where it takes a fresh start as a stream."

"You have got it bad, my son," said the old man, shaking his head.

"Got what?"

"The craze for getting out. It nearly drove me wild before I conquered it. But I suppose you must go through the fever, the same as I did."

"Fever or no fever," replied Dorlon, "I believe that the water will show us the way out of the gulch, and I am convinced that we will not have to dig far before we find the outlet."

"Very well; I don't want to discourage you, and am ready to go to work. We must have something to pass the time, and may as well do that as anything."

CHAPTER VI.

FOLLOWING THE WATER.

TOOLS were needed for the excavation and underground exploration, and the two prisoners set at work to make such articles as they could, of the hardest wood the valley afforded. The old man was careful to make only such as should, as he said, be useful to them while they remained in the valley. It was evident that he had no faith at all in the success of the enterprise.

Dorlon, however, worked with spirit and energy, and the digging was soon begun.

An oblong excavation was made at the side of the sink, with the intention of burrowing under, or breaking down the partition, when the proper depth should be reached. The earth was carried away in stout baskets which they made of green withes, and stones that were too large for them to roll out were dug under and allowed to go down with the excavation. They also struck some heavy points of rock, which they were obliged to leave, as they had no means of blasting them or breaking them up.

The want of efficient steel tools was severely felt, and the work of excavation proceeded slowly. The hole, also, owing to obstructions which it had not been possible to remove, became smaller as they went down, until at last it threatened to terminate in a point.

This was the state of the case at the end of six weeks' work, when the hole had reached a depth of about fifty feet, and was not likely to get any deeper unless some better method of excavation could be devised.

It was then that Dorlon, after listening at the bottom of the hole, decided that the time had come for breaking through the partition that separated them from the sink, and they began to dig in that direction.

When they had penetrated a little distance into the partition, and could plainly hear the water falling on the other side, as if into a pool, Mr. Warren was seized with some of Dorlon's enthusiasm, and put his whole heart into the work. He said that it was only curiosity that moved him, and that he merely wanted to see what the sink really was; but his companion was sure that he showed strong symptoms of hope.

Most of the work in the hole had been done by the light of torches, as they had nearly exhausted their supply of deer-fat, and were unwilling to kill more animals than they needed, merely for the sake of the fat.

At last they were sure that they were nearly through the partition, and Mr. Warren was tugging at a boulder that blocked the way.

"Take care!" shouted Dorlon, seizing the old man and drawing him back, just as the stone moved, not toward him, but from him, and fell into the water on the other side.

At the same time a quantity of earth and stones that had not been touched by the diggers gave way, and took the same direction.

The two workers hastened to enlarge the opening, taking pains not to approach the edge too closely, and the glimpses they caught of the view beyond made them yet more eager in the labor.

When they had enlarged the hole sufficiently to suit their purposes, each seized a torch, and hastened to the edge.

There they beheld a spectacle so strange that they gazed at it for awhile in silence.

Hardly more than ten feet below them was the surface of a lake, broad, dark and still, overhung by the rocky roof of a large cavern.

At the right the main stream that drained the valley fell down in a torrent that gleamed and glistened in the light of the torches. Before them the brook that came from the slide poured in, and other streams of water that fed the lake could be distinctly seen.

"This is a wonder," said Mr. Warren at last.

"It is our salvation," replied Dorlon. "This is better than I hoped for."

"There is a large body of water here; but I can see no outlet."

"There must be an outlet, and we will find it. We have done a good day's work, and now it is time for supper."

After supper, as they smoked the fragrant weed in their pipes, they discussed the situation, and laid plans for availing themselves of their great discovery.

"We must build a boat," said Dorlon.

Warren suggested that a raft would be easier to construct and safer to manage; but the young man insisted that they should have such a boat as would enable them to navigate the passage through which the water made its way out of the valley.

"We will make a bull boat, then," said Warren.

As he professed to be able to build that kind of a craft, a bull boat was determined on.

The next day they set at work again more zealously than ever, and Dorlon was surprised to see how the old man's spirits had risen in view of the possibility of escaping from his long and wearisome imprisonment.

They lowered the excavation to the water's edge, rolled into the lake the large rocks which they had not been able to remove, and made a

gradual slope from the bottom of the pit to the surface of the valley, so that they could have an easy approach to the water.

Then they made a bull boat—a construction of hides drawn tightly over a frame of poles, the seams carefully sewn together with small thongs, and heavily covered with pitch.

When this craft was completed, it looked more like an oblong bowl than a boat; but they carried it down to the lake, where it floated well, and proved to be as tight as a drum.

They were in ecstasies over this achievement, and Dorlon declared that they would be able to carry a heavy freight away from the valley.

The boat was equipped with a seat at each end, and two paddles, and then they were ready to explore the lake. They set out with eager anticipations, Warren holding a torch at the bow, while Dorlon paddled.

After skirting the edge of the underground lake, they finally reached a dark tunnel, to which they had allowed the current to drift them, and which was evidently the outlet of the water.

"This is the place," said Dorlon. "That is the route we must take to leave the valley."

"Do you mean to say that we must go through that hole?" asked the old man.

"Certainly, and we should be glad of the chance. The water goes out through that channel, and we can do nothing but follow it."

"Very well. It can't do more than kill us, and we might as well be dead as shut up here."

It was plain that Mr. Warren had changed his tone considerably since he said that he had settled down to quiet endurance of his lot. He no longer showed the apathy of despair, but the eagerness of hope.

Having determined to make the venture, they cooked provisions for their journey into the unknown, and stowed them away in the boat, with a skin vessel filled with water. Then they sewed up in sacks of hide as much of Warren's store of gold nuggets as they thought they could safely carry, and fastened the sacks to the timbers of the bull boat, so that they would know where to find them, as Dorlon said, in case the craft should founder. Finally, they prepared a supply of torches, and were ready to start.

Mr. Warren sat in the bow with a torch, while his companion occupied the stern, and paddled the queer craft straight into the dark tunnel.

"I am afraid, my son," said the old man, "that this bull boat will prove to be our coffin."

"Better to die here than to make no stroke for freedom," replied Dorlon.

"What if this stream should drop into another sink-hole, as it does at the foot of the valley?"

"Then we must drop with it. Liberty or death is our motto now!"

"Perhaps this hole may become so narrow that we can't squeeze through it, and we may stay in here and starve to death."

"I have no fear of that, Mr. Warren, whatever happens. But what is the use of borrowing trouble and dreaming of disaster? I prefer to say that we shall pass safely through this tunnel which the water has bored in the rock, and come out in a green and beautiful valley, and soon reach the habitations of men, and then hurrah for the Death Gulch mine!"

Dorlon's enthusiasm was infectious, and the old man grumbled no more.

Indeed, the prospect of escaping from the valley seemed to be good, though the gloomy tunnel might well depress the spirits of the voyagers into the unknown. The stream was deep enough for the boat, and it flowed with a strong and steady current, so that Dorlon's paddling sent them forward at a pretty rapid rate. The hole continued to be large enough for their passage, the course appeared to be a straight one, and there were no obstructions that threatened to wreck or stop them.

After about two hours of this safe but monotonous travel, and when they were beginning to hope that they must be near the end of their strange journey, Mr. Warren suddenly dropped his torch and grasped the sides of the boat.

"Take care!" he shouted. "Hold on!"

Dorlon quickly shipped his paddle and braced himself as well as he could, when the bull boat pitched forward and downward at a fearful rate of speed. At one moment it seemed to drop straight down; at another it was nearly buried by the rushing water and the flying spray. The clumsy craft was whirled about at the mercy of the torrent, and the two voyagers, crouched in the bottom, could do nothing but accept whatever fate awaited them.

But the bull boat was buoyant, all the ballast was in the bottom, and at last it floated in still water at the foot of the torrent.

"Are you there, Mr. Warren," asked Dorlon.

"I believe so."

"All is safe, then. That was what may be called a rapid."

"Much too rapid for me, my son."

"But we are safe and sound, and now we will take a fresh start."

It was first necessary to bale out the boat, which was half-full of water. It was then discovered that they had no torches. The supply had been washed away, and they had no means

of striking a light, if torch timber had been plenty.

"We can go in the darkness just as well," said Dorlon. "There is no fear that we will get out of our course."

He changed places with the old man, who paddled slowly, while his young friend, stationed at the bow, kept the bull boat in the proper course, not by the sense of sight, but by that of feeling.

It was a tedious and uncomfortable style of traveling. The torch had been a great comfort to them, and the darkness was oppressive since their light had been extinguished. The doubts and dangers of their underground voyage seemed to grow greater than ever, and it was then clearly impossible for them to return to the gulch, whatever might happen. They had shot one dangerous rapid, and at any moment, with nothing to warn them, they might be pitched down another and a worse one, that would bring the adventure to a tragical end.

Dorlon tried to raise the spirits of his companion, but found the old man moody and indisposed to talk.

At last, after peering silently ahead into the gloom for some time, he uttered a glad shout.

"See!" he exclaimed. "There is light ahead!"

The old man also saw it, or fancied he saw it, and paddled more vigorously. Soon the light was visible enough, and after a while they could plainly see the blue sky through a large opening.

"Send her in to the shore," said Dorlon, as they approached the valley, and this direction was at once obeyed.

"What is the matter?" asked Warren, as the young man seized a rock, and brought the boat to a stop.

"I was afraid there might be a fall near here. I am sure there is, as I can hear the noise plainly."

They dropped the boat gradually to the mouth of the tunnel, where they got out and surveyed the position.

The stream fell over the face of the rock in a clear sheet to the valley below. It was not a great fall, but sufficient to have demolished their boat and put an end to their lives, if they had taken the jump. Below them the stream flowed smoothly through a beautiful plain, to join a river that could be faintly seen in the distance.

With no little labor they succeeded in getting the bull boat and its contents down into the valley, where it was launched and loaded again, and they continued their journey, rejoicing in light and liberty.

CHAPTER VII.

A FEW YEARS AFTER.

QUITE a settlement had sprung up around Death Gulch mine, with stamp mills, smelting house, assay office, houses for miners, and a large allowance of stores, hotels, and liquor saloons.

The settlement was known as Death Gulch, because that was the name of the mine, and because it was on the table-land adjoining the great chasm of that name. But there was already talk of selecting a less ominous title, as the inhabitants firmly believed that their town was bound to become one of the chief cities of the mining region.

Death Gulch mine had proved to be a wonderfully profitable enterprise. It produced large quantities of ore that was exceedingly rich in gold, and was supposed to have already yielded immense fortunes to its two proprietors, Buchanan Farley—commonly known as Buck Farley—and John Warne. They had never "stocked" their mine, and had admitted no person into partnership, but were its sole and envied owners.

John Warne was an elderly man, who was said to be fond of taking his ease, and the business of the mine was usually managed by his young and active partner, Buck Farley.

The most substantial building in the town was the office of the Death Gulch mine, which was so solidly constructed of stone that it might be made to serve as a fortress in case of need. The proprietors must have been convinced of the permanency of the vein they were working, or they would not have erected such an enduring structure. It was two stories in height, a portion of the lower story being used as the office of the mine, and the remainder of the building was occupied by the owners, who kept a bachelor establishment that was said to be richly supplied with everything that money could procure.

At a desk in the office of the mine was seated the active partner, Buck Farley.

He was a young and decidedly handsome man, tall and firmly built, and with an expression of mingled authority and amiability in his bright blue eyes. His face was covered with a heavy beard and mustache of chestnut hue, his brown hair was cropped close, and he was dressed well, but without any special assumption of "style."

On the doorstep stood a man who was nominally a messenger and doorkeeper, but in reality a guard, as he was heavily armed, in view of the possibility of some daring attempt to rob

the office. Inside there was a rack of rifles, and two clerks who were writing at their desks were armed with revolvers.

A young man presented himself at the door, and asked if Mr. Farley was within.

He was a hunchback, he walked slowly, supporting himself with a cane, and his thin face was pale. His clothes were of good quality, but worn and travel-stained.

The sentry looked at him closely, then opened the door, and let him in.

The stranger approached the desk at which Buck Farley was writing, and that gentleman looked up, with a slight start. The hunchback also seemed to be surprised and startled, and did not attempt to conceal his emotion.

"What can I do for you?" asked the proprietor, laying down his pen.

"I want to speak to Mr. Farley," replied the hunchback.

"I am Mr. Farley."

"There is something familiar in your face; but I do not suppose I have ever seen you before."

The mine owner smiled.

"Sit down," he said, "and tell me what I can do for you."

"I am looking for work, sir, and have called to see if I can find anything to do here."

"Possibly you can. What can you do? Of course you are not strong enough for work in a mine."

"That is true, Mr. Farley, and I have never been trained to do anything in particular. But I am a good writer, and can keep accounts."

"What is your name?"

"Benito Rosalba."

"Spanish?"

"Of Spanish descent, but born on the soil of the United States."

"Your age?" asked Mr. Farley, who was noting these points on a slip of paper.

"Seventeen, and soon to be eighteen. I may as well tell you, sir, that I am the son of Pedro Rosalba, who owns a large cattle farm not far from here."

"I have heard of him," said the mine owner.

"Have you left home? You must excuse me for questioning you so closely; but I do not know you, and you bring me no recommendations, and I am particular about the people I take into my employment."

"You have a right to be, and I am quite willing to tell you all my story, which is a short and simple one. I left my home because it was no longer a home for me. I had a sister—a step-sister, rather, a few years older than I am, of whom I was very fond."

Is she dead?" asked Mr. Farley, with more feeling than the case seemed to call for.

"Oh, no. At least I hope she is not dead."

My sister Rose loved a young American, who came out here from one of the Eastern States, and my parents were opposed to his attentions, because they wanted to marry her to my cousin, Manuel Vincente. Some five years ago the young American disappeared."

"Did he desert her?" asked Farley.

"No, sir. At least, she was sure that he would never have left her of his own free will. He—in fact, it was supposed that something happened to him—that he died."

"Possibly he may have fallen into Death Gulch," suggested the mine owner.

The hunchback shuddered, and a look of intense horror came into his pale face. He covered his eyes with his hands, as if to shut out a frightful vision.

"What a terrible fate that would be!" he exclaimed.

"Terrible, indeed; but it is only a possibility, and my guess need not disturb you. What happened then, my young friend?"

"After the American was out of the way, my father and mother tried to persuade Rose to marry Manuel; but she refused. They let her alone for a while, hoping that time would lessen her grief for the loss of her lover; but she still mourned for him, and disliked my cousin more and more every day. Then they began to persecute her, and vowed that they would compel her to marry Manuel; but they could not move her. I could do nothing for her, and they treated me harshly because I took her part. At last their persecutions became so severe, and she was so afraid that they would force her into a marriage, that she could no longer endure her life at the ranch, and she ran away."

"How long ago was this?" asked Mr. Farley.

"Three years."

"What became of her?"

"I do not know. She disappeared, and since then I have never seen her or heard of her."

"Are you sure that something did not happen to her also—that she did not die?"

"I have no fear of that, sir. I believe that she left the house of her own accord, as she took with her a bundle of clothing and her jewels. My father and Manuel, as soon as she was missed, mounted their horses and sent men out, and searched for her in all directions; but they found no trace of her. I am sure that she would have sent word to me long ago, if she had not been afraid that the message would fall into their hands and tell them where to look for her."

"That is a sad story," said the mine owner;

"but I do not yet see what it has to do with your leaving your home."

"Senor Rosalba and my mother were very bitter against me, after Rose's disappearance, because they accused me of having aided her flight, and I often told them that I wished I had been able to do so. My life at the ranch was nothing but pain to me after Rose left, and in the course of time I followed her example, and ran away."

"How long ago was that?"

"A little more than a year."

"Did they search for you?"

"I doubt if they considered me of enough consequence to search for me, though I was their only son. Both of them always thought far more of my cousin, Manuel Vincente, than of me. Since I left them I have scrambled for myself as well as I could, and have picked up a living in one place and another—not a very good one as you may judge—and just now I must confess that I am about at my row's end."

"It may be the best end," said the mine owner. "You shall not suffer if you stay with me. I am interested in you and in the story you have told me, and am willing to help you. If I can find a place for you here, may not your father come and claim you?"

"I do not believe he will, sir. If he should, I need not go with him."

"That is true. You need not go with him while you are in my care. I will make room for you, my young friend, and will give you a fair trial. If you make good the judgment I have formed of you, you will be very useful to me. I will find a room for you here, until you can look about. Do you need any money?"

Benito did not need any money, and he thanked his new employer heartily for his kindness and liberality.

"It is strange," he said, "that there is something so familiar to me in your face. It seems as if I must have known you before."

"Perhaps you have," replied Mr. Farley—"in one of the worlds before this. Some men claim that we have passed through many such worlds, and that now and then something happens to recall one of them to us. But this is the only world we have to do with at present, and now we will attend to business."

Benito was given a desk, and was shown the room that he was to occupy in the upper story of the stone building, and he began to believe that he had at last happened upon a clover patch.

The active partner in the Death Gulch mine discovered, or fancied that he discovered, unusual business qualities in the young hunchback. After a few weeks' trial Benito was advanced in the office, and was requested to retain his room up-stairs, which was a handsome one, and finely furnished.

One evening he was invited by Mr. Farley into that gentleman's sitting-room, where he found a tall and well-dressed man, with white hair and beard, and with a benevolent cast of countenance.

"This is Mr. Warne, my partner," said Farley. "He has lately returned from the East, Benito, and I have been telling him the story which you related to me when you came here looking for employment."

"I have been deeply interested in that story," said the old gentleman, looking closely at Benito, "and would be glad to get some further particulars. Do you know what course your sister took when she left home?"

"I know nothing about her but what I have told Mr. Farley," replied Benito.

"But you have traveled considerably since then. I suppose you have made inquiries about her?"

"It is little traveling that I have been able to do, sir, and my inquiries have amounted to nothing. It takes a great deal of money to employ detectives and keep up such a search as I would have to make."

"Well, young man, I wish to say to you, with the approbation of my partner—we are both interested in your story—that if you want to search for your sister we are willing to help you. You can have leave of absence for that purpose as soon as you want it, and we will supply you with all the money you need."

"You are too kind and too generous!" exclaimed Benito, bursting into tears. "I do not know how to thank you. Money can do anything."

"Money can do much," remarked Farley; "but it cannot do everything."

CHAPTER VIII.

ROSINA.

In the second story front room of a respectable house in San Francisco—not in the fashionable quarter, but near the business portion of the city—an elderly woman was seated.

The room was a large one, handsomely and substantially furnished. In an alcove, shut off from the main room by heavy curtains, was a bed. On one side of the room was a large desk, similar to those that are used in business offices, covered with a miscellaneous litter of papers, pamphlets and maps. In a corner was a small steel safe, of fine workmanship.

Then appliances gave the apartment a business aspect, which was hardly neutralized by the many articles of feminine taste and use that were scattered about.

The elderly lady might better be termed middle-aged, judging her by her fresh and unwrinkled face, and her erect and alert attitude, though the many white threads in her brown hair told of advancing years. She was tall, somewhat angular, habited in a neat morning wrapper, and of a decidedly pleasing expression of countenance.

As she sat near a window, busied with a bit of fanciful embroidery, she glanced, every now and then, at a fine clock on the mantle, and a little frown came on her brow whenever she noted the progress of the hands.

At last a joyful light came into her eyes, as the door below opened and shut, and then there were footfalls on the stairs—very light footfalls, but which easily reached her attentive ears.

Directly the door of the apartment opened, and a woman stepped in briskly.

This woman was a little under the average stature of women, but graceful in form and action. She wore a rich and fashionably-made street dress, and, although her face was covered with a thick veil, it was easy to decide that she was young.

"My dear Rose!" exclaimed the elderly lady. "Have you come home at last? You said that you meant to hurry back, and now it is nearly three o'clock."

"There was more business waiting my attention than I had expected to find," said the other; "but I got through with it as soon as I possibly could."

"You must be very tired, poor child. Do sit down and rest, and tell me all the news."

The woman who was addressed as Rose dropped into an easy-chair, and drew aside her veil, disclosing a brunette face, youthful and of great beauty, with large, dark eyes, and a remarkably expressive countenance.

"Nevada silver has reached 88," she said.

"Did you sell?"

"No. I am expecting it to reach 95."

"You are very daring, my dear, not to say risky. I would have jumped at the chance, and would have realized at once."

"We must risk, my dear Mrs. Outram, in order to have. I am not a bit afraid of that stock. I have the most reliable points from Hornby—good accounts from the lower levels—and am sure it will go up. We ought to touch the top of the market if we can."

"Yes, but you keep me on thorns, and I am getting terribly nervous. When a stock drops, it goes down with such a rush."

"I had to deposit more margin on the Two Brothers investment," said Rose.

"My! that was a pull."

"And that is not all. I have bought a big block of New Ophir."

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed the old lady, dropping her embroidery. "Are you crazy, Rose? Do you mean to go into every new thing, and pick up every wildcat stock that is floated?"

"New Ophir is a new stock, Mrs. Outram; but you have no right to call it a wildcat. I am assured on the best authority that it has an excellent basis, and that Buck Farley is backing it. Those who can get in first on a good thing naturally have the best of it."

"If Farley is backing it, it ought to be a solid stock. But you must have paid out a great deal of money to-day, Rose. How does your bank account stand?"

"Squeezed dry. In fact, I overdrew it to-day; but I spoke to the teller, and he certified my check just the same."

"But how, in the name of wonder, do you expect to carry all your stocks, when you have no more money?"

"I am going to borrow, I am expecting Hornby every minute, and it is for that reason that I have not taken off my hat and veil."

It may be explained here, while she is waiting for Mr. Hornby, that the young woman whom Mrs. Outram addressed as Rose, and who was known to the speculative world of San Francisco as Rosina, was seldom seen without her veil, and never by the masculine portion of the community, though many of them were ardently desirous of getting a peep at the face it concealed. It was not supposed that any personal disfigurement caused her to hide that face, as those who had seen it reported her as being young and beautiful. The proprietor of the house in which the two ladies had for a long time occupied rooms had once ventured to ask Mrs. Outram what Miss Rosina's "other name" was.

"Why, Outram, of course," replied the old lady. "Is she not my niece?"

Yet she was known to the world in general, and to the business world in particular, merely as "Rosina;" her bank account was in the name of "Rosina," and all her checks were signed "Rosina." She was considered an eccentric young lady, who had chosen to enter into speculation, and, as she had proved herself a daring and successful operator, her eccentricity was respected.

The door bell rung, and a servant came up to announce Mr. Hornby.

"Send him up," said Rose, as she dropped her veil.

The man who entered the room was short and fat, but with a bustling, breezy way, and a round, oily, intelligent, and good-humored face. When his hat was off, he was seen to be bald on the top of his head.

"This is Mr. Hornby, Mrs. Outram," said Rose, as she offered him a chair. "Each of you has often heard me speak of the other."

"I am glad to see Mrs. Outram," he said, "and I wish, Miss Rosina, that I could see you. Do you always wear that veil?"

"Sometimes I wear another," she replied, with a little laugh.

"I wish I could induce you to renounce it. But we must take things as they are, and be satisfied with the blessings that are sent us."

"As you are, Mr. Hornby?"

"Yes, when I can't help myself. This looks like business," he continued, as he glanced at everything visible in the room. "It also looks like home, and the two extremes seem to meet very well. But I must say that I am surprised to see such a litter on the desk of a business woman."

"I am half crazy to put it to rights," said Mrs. Outram; "but she will never allow me to touch it."

"Don't I clear it off every now and then, when I happen to have time?" asked Rose.

"There is one necessity of every business office, which you ought to have," remarked Mr. Hornby, "and that is a waste-basket. But I am here for a business purpose, and not to criticize your arrangements. How much money do you want, and for what time?"

"Fifty thousand dollars, for ninety days."

"You have raised the figure," remarked Hornby, while Mrs. Outram opened her eyes wide.

"Yes; I wanted to be sure of having enough," replied Rose.

"It is a large sum. What security can you give me?"

"My note."

"Have you no stocks or bonds that you can turn over to me?"

"Nothing that I can get hold of now. I want the money, as I told you, to carry my contracts and hold my stock."

"Very well. Suppose you sit down and write the note, and then I will write the check."

Rosa seated herself at the desk without lifting her veil, and wrote, after the date, these lines in a firm running hand:

"Ninety days after date I promise to pay to Jacob Hornby or order, Fifty thousand Dollars for value received."

ROSINA.

"Would it not be better to sign your full name?" he asked, as he glanced at the note.

"Why should I?" she replied. "All my business is transacted in that name, and it is known at the banks. Besides, Mr. Hornby, you know that I borrow this money on my credit, or my honor—"

"Both of which stand high," he remarked.

"And if I should not pay you under one name, I would not be likely to do so under another."

"Quite true," he replied, and he wrote a check for \$47,000, which he handed to her.

"I have deducted the interest," he said—"two per cent. a month. Business is business, and must be attended to as such."

"That is right, sir."

"The check is dated to-morrow, when you can have it certified if you wish. And now, my dear young lady, I must say to you that this is a heavier sum than I could afford to lose at this time. If you should fail to pay your note when it is due, I would be seriously embarrassed."

"I am thankful to you, Mr. Hornby, and I shall not fail you," said Rose, as she gave him her hand, and he left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

A WOLF AT THE DOOR.

ROSE put her check in the safe, laid aside her hat and veil, and seated herself near Mrs. Outram.

"That is a big sum to borrow, my dear," said the old lady.

"And a steep rate of interest," replied Rose.

"But we are all right now for ninety days, anyhow. Hornby is a friend in need."

"I judge that he would be glad to form a partnership with you in another sort of business."

"That of matrimony? Perhaps he would. But I want no other partner than you, my dear auntie, and I am sure that you have always brought me good luck, and that we have done splendidly together."

"But I do not really like the business, Rose, though it is very exciting. Do you ever reflect upon the fact that we are gamblers?"

"I suppose we are, in a sense. So are all those who buy and sell stocks, and those who speculate in grain and so many other articles. If we are gamblers, we are in a goodly company, and with us are many of those who are respected and honored because they are rich. After all, Mrs. Outram, it is the winning that

counts, and we are getting rich. Even if I should realize on my contracts now, lumping the good and bad together, we would have quite a fortune."

"I suppose we would, if there should not come a crash, or a crisis, or something of that sort. But we must not borrow trouble for the future, as long as we can borrow money for the present. When I see you now, dear Rose, so bright and active and buoyant, my thoughts go back to the day, three years ago, when I found you lying on the alkali plain, by the side of the stage route."

"Yes, auntie, and you saved my life. I was worn out, exhausted, famished, and had lain down there to die, wishing for nothing but a speedy death. You made them lift me into the stage, and you fed me, nursed me, and brought me here, and ever since then you have taken care of me, and I owe you everything."

"Your presence and your love have more than paid me for that, dear child. You have been all the world to a lonely woman. Besides, it is you who have made our fortune, if it is a fortune."

"Did not you furnish the capital, auntie?"

"That is a small matter. You have furnished the brains and the enterprise and the energy. The ambition to get rich, Rose, is better than no ambition, and it has given you life and strength. But when you are really rich, what do you expect to do with your money?"

"Do with it? Do you not know what I want, what I mean to do with it? Money is power. When I have enough of that power—as much as I believe will suffice for the purpose—I mean to use it to crush Pedro Rosalba."

"To crush him?" exclaimed Mrs. Outram.

"Yes, to crush him, to destroy him. I do not yet know what it is that I shall do; but I mean to ruin him, to crush him as a man would crush a poisonous snake!"

Rose had risen to her feet in her excitement, and her face was flushed, filled with the bitter sorrow of the past and the fierce intent of the future.

"My poor child!" muttered the old lady. "She has not forgotten her sorrow, and a new passion has seized her. Do you mean what you say, Rose?"

"I do, most solemnly."

"But Pedro Rosalba is your mother's husband."

"He murdered my lover, and I have good cause to suspect him of having murdered my father!"

Mrs. Outram bent over her embroidery, and Rose, sinking into a chair, covered her face with her hands, and for a few moments neither of them spoke.

"What we have just been speaking of," said Rose, raising her head, "reminds me of a fright that I had this morning."

"A fright, my dear?"

"Yes—a terrible fright. I thought that I saw my cousin, Manuel Vincente, on the street near the Mining Exchange."

"Mercy on us!"

"I am not sure that it was he; but the thought gave me such a fright that I trembled in every limb, and was scarcely able to stand. I managed to get into Hornby's office, and there I dropped into a chair, and looked over the tape as it passed through the ticker, at the same time keeping a sly watch at the window, to see if he should pass. But I saw nothing more of that man."

"Even if it was he, Rose, he cannot have recognized you under that veil."

"I do not know. Some people know a girl by her form and movement. I have worn that veil so long, covering my face from all men, as if I were a Turk, because of my fear of Pedro Rosalba and his agents; but above all I have feared Manuel Vincente. If he should suspect, that would be enough for him, and he would pursue me like a bloodhound."

Mrs. Outram soothed and cheered her young friend, telling her that she was a woman of business, and of too strong and active a mind to allow idle fears and mere imaginings to take possession of her and overcome her self-control, and Rose gradually shook off the dread that had seized her.

"Now, my dear," said the old lady, "you will do me a great favor if you will take this bottle around to the druggist's, and have the prescription duplicated. I believe it has done me a great deal of good."

Rose donned her hat and veil, and went out with the bottle, glad of a chance to oblige her good and loving friend.

Fifteen minutes had not elapsed, when she returned in a hurry, let herself into the house with her latch-key, ran up-stairs, and re-entered the room, breathless and trembling.

"Rose! Rose! what is the matter?" asked Mrs. Outram, seeing how pale and startled she was.

"It is he," answered Rose. "I saw him again as I came out of the drug store, and again I was frightened. I walked rapidly toward home, and he followed me rapidly. Then I ran to the house."

"Are you sure it was he, Rose?"

"I saw his face and recognized him at once. Hark! there he is!"

The door bell rung below, and directly a man's voice was heard, inquiring for "Miss Rosina."

"Run into the alcove, Rose," said Mrs. Outram, "and I will give orders that he shall not be admitted."

The girl hastened to conceal herself; but Mrs. Outram was not quick enough in giving her orders, as the unwelcome visitor followed the housemaid up-stairs, and presented himself to her before she could close the door.

He was a tall and well-dressed young man; but his dark complexion, low brows, and coarse features, inspired her with a feeling of repulsion.

"I wish to see the lady whose name is Rosina," he said.

"There is no such person here," gruffly replied Mrs. Outram, with a reckless disregard of truth.

"I saw her enter this house, and I am sure that this is her room, and I wish to see her."

"There is no person here who wishes to see you," said Mrs. Outram.

"That is not to the point," he replied, with a sneer. "I believe that there is a person here whom I wish to see, and I propose to walk in and look for her."

He stepped forward as he spoke; but Mrs. Outram suddenly snatched a loaded revolver from a table near the door, cocked it, and presented it at him.

"If you take another step toward this room," she said, "I will shoot you down!"

She was as pale as death, but her face was full of determination. He might have seen such a look in some wild animal which a hunter had threatened to deprive of its cub. He halted instantly.

"My name is Manuel Vincente," he said. "I have reason to believe that the lady who is known as Rosina is my cousin, Rose Rosalba. I have a right to see her."

"You have no right to see any person in this room," replied Mrs. Outram. "Go away from this door, and leave this house immediately, or, as surely as there is a God who guards the innocent, I will kill you where you stand!"

There could be no doubt that the woman meant what she said. Manuel Vincente tried to call up his accustomed sneer; but his face spoke only of baffled malice.

"I cannot find it in my heart to refuse such a polite request from a lady," he said. "I will go, as you insist upon it; but you may assure my fair cousin that I will interview her elsewhere."

As he turned away, Mrs. Outram closed the door, and locked and bolted it. Then she sunk into a chair, trembling with excitement.

Rose came out from the alcove, listened at the door as the intruder passed down stairs, and watched him as he walked up the street.

"My poor auntie!" she said. "It is a shame that you should have had such a task as that. I would have taken it on my own hands, if I had known what was needed."

"Never mind me, my dear. I feel better for it, now that it is over—more like a woman—or more like a man. I would surely have shot him, Rose, if he had tried to enter this room."

"I believe you would, auntie. And now, my dear, I must put you to another test of your love. It is impossible for me to remain here in hourly fear of that man. We must leave San Francisco at once."

"Very well, my child. Where shall we go to?"

"Far from here—to the other side of the continent."

"Mercy on us! What a journey!"

"But you will be delighted with New York, auntie dear. It is so long since you have been at the East, and there is so much to see there. I am sure you will be delighted."

"Will I? I will be delighted if you are safe and contented."

"Then we shall pack up immediately. We will take the first train in the morning. We will go to a hotel to-night. I cannot remain in this house a minute longer than is necessary."

"But your business, my child?"

"I can easily arrange that. I shall leave a note for Hornby, and I can stop at Sacramento and cash my check."

"Let us pack our trunks, Rose."

CHAPTER X.

THE SMASH IN NEW OPHIR.

THE hour that saw Rosina and Mrs. Outram busily employed in preparing for their flight from San Francisco, found Buck Farley, many miles to the northward, seated in conversation with his partner, John Warne.

"Now, my friend and partner," said he, "the time has come to close in on Pedro Rosalba's cash."

"Has he swallowed all he can hold?" asked Mr. Warne.

"He is in as deep as he can go. He has invested in New Ophir all the money he could raise. He now owns more than half of that precious stock, and boasts that he holds the controlling interest. At the next election for directors he

expects to put his own men in. Then he intends to freeze out the other stockholders in the usual way, and to become the sole owner of the biggest bonanza that has yet been brought to light."

"The uncertainty of mining speculations is amazing," remarked Mr. Warne.

"As Pedro Rosalba will soon learn to his sorrow. I shall start to the East in the morning. You had better write to Brenham, in San Francisco, telling him to be ready to throw on the market all the stock in his hands, as soon as I notify him by telegraph from New York. I will flood the Eastern market at the same time, and then there will be nothing left to do but to erect a tombstone to the memory of New Ophir."

"Its backbone will be broken effectually, no doubt. How much will the operation cost us, Farley?"

"Cost us? It will be money in our pockets, to say nothing of other considerations. We shall easily clear fifty thousand after paying all expenses."

"People will talk about salted mines and sharp practice."

"Let them talk. Men who are worth millions are never touched by talk."

John Warne rested his head on his hand, absorbed in reflection.

"What are you thinking of?" asked his partner.

"Wait a moment, Farley. The innocent ought not to suffer with the guilty."

"The innocent? Who are the innocent?"

"Brenham tells me there is a pretty large block of New Ophir which he has not been able to get hold of. He does not know who holds it at present, but is sure that it is not in the hands of Rosalba."

"Tell him to find out who holds it, and telegraph me at New York. We will see that the owner or owners, if they are really not connected with Rosalba, shall not suffer."

"That will make everything clear, my boy, and you may sit down on New Ophir as soon as you please."

Buck Farley was delayed in his journey to New York.

On the morning of his arrival the receiving teller of the Exchange National Bank in that city was confronted by a new customer.

This customer was a lady, graceful in form, and elegantly dressed, whose face was concealed by a heavy black veil.

"I wish to open an account," she said, as she laid down a slip of paper and a roll of bills.

"In what name?" asked the teller.

"Rosina."

"Rosina who?"

"Simply Rosina."

The teller stared at her almost impolitely. Her thick veil and the singularity of the name she gave made him wonder whether she might not be a swindler or an insane person.

"We have never opened an account in that style," he said. "I do not think it can be allowed. You must give your full name."

"That is my business name and style," she replied. "I have no other."

The teller requested her to step in and speak to the cashier, to whom she carried her slip and her roll of bills, making the same proposition she had made to the teller and receiving substantially the same reply.

"I have been transacting business in San Francisco for a long time," she said, "speculating in mining shares, and quite successfully. I have transferred my business to New York, and the account I propose to open with you is not a very small one."

The cashier looked at the slip and the roll of bills, and was visibly impressed by the inspection.

"I have done business in San Francisco," she continued, "for reasons of my own, under the name of Rosina, and no objection has been made to it. In fact, I would not be recognized under any other name. If you will telegraph there, to the bank in which I kept my account, you will learn that I am a reliable business woman."

"I will do so at once," said the cashier. "In the mean time you may make a special deposit, if you choose to do so. Call here this afternoon, before the bank closes, and I hope that everything will prove satisfactory."

At the appointed hour Rosina called at the bank, accepted the apologies of the cashier, received her bank book, and hastened up town to the hotel at which she and Mrs. Outram were stopping.

"I have opened an account at last, auntie," she said, as she entered the room where the old lady was occupied with her everlasting embroidery. "These New York people seem to be terribly fussy and particular. I could hardly have had more trouble if I had wanted to borrow as much money as I deposited."

"Well, my dear child, it seems that all business is bother, and you must expect to have plenty of worry. Here is a telegram for you that has just been brought up."

Rosina raised her veil, and tore open the envelope.

The dispatch was very brief, but there was enough in it to make her open her eyes and turn pale.

"Mercy on us!" she exclaimed, "This is a blow. If there was any stock that I believed to be sure to rise, it was New Ophir; but here I am called upon for twenty per cent. more margin. Think of it! Twenty per cent!"

"That means a heavy fall, I suppose."

"A terrible tumble. What a gap it will tear in my new bank account!"

"Ah, my dear, this is a risky business that you are engaged in."

"It is always risky, auntie, when the little fish swim where the big fish can swallow them. But what can be the meaning of this? Buck Farley was backing New Ophir, and he is a man of millions. Hand me the evening paper, please."

She glanced hurriedly at the commercial column, and laid down the paper with a sigh.

"It is even so," she said. "New Ophir has tumbled to 85. This looks like a panic. I must go out at once, auntie dear, and try to learn what is the matter."

She hastened to a mining stock broker of her acquaintance, and the news she gathered deepened the gloom that had begun to settle about her.

A report had been spread in San Francisco to the effect that the New Ophir mine was a proved failure; that the lead which had been supposed to be a "fissure vein" had turned out to be merely a "pocket;" and that the pay ore was already quite exhausted. Owing to this report, and to the sale of large blocks of shares in the San Francisco market, the stock had "taken a tumble," and there was no telling how low it would drop.

When Rosina came down town the next morning, she soon learned that a panic had struck her favorite stock and shattered it.

The damaging report from San Francisco had not been officially denied, and its truth could no longer be doubted. The stock opened at 50, and large amounts were thrown at once on the market, forcing it down to 30. It was stated and generally believed that Buck Farley was a large seller. New Ophir fell to 20, and then to 15, at which figure it closed, and was shaky at that.

Rosina carried a woeful countenance home, and burst into tears as soon as she entered her room. It seemed to her that her career as a business woman had ended in the most utter failure, and the crash was so sudden that it came near breaking her heart. Mrs. Outram in vain endeavored to cheer her.

"It is all over, auntie," she said. "I am ruined, you are ruined, we are ruined. We shall be forced to conjugate the verb to ruin in all its moods and tenses."

"Is it really so bad as that, my dear?"

"I do not see how it could be worse. New Ophir is down to fifteen, without the slightest prospect of improvement, and I am pledged to buy heaps of it at 115, a clear loss of a dollar on every dollar of stock, as far as heard from. My contract matures in a few days, and it will cost me all my cash to settle."

"But you have other property, Rose."

"More stock, which may go the same way. If I should be forced to realize, I could not possibly secure enough to pay what I borrowed of Hornby, that good, kind man."

"You might fail, Rose," suggested Mrs. Outram, with the air of a woman of wisdom. "Men are all the time doing that sort of thing, and they seem to be none the worse for it."

"If I should fail to meet my contract, auntie, that would be ruin for me, whatever it might be for a man. It is ruin in any event, in whatever light we look at it—nothing but ruin. Oh, what scoundrels men are! I may be a fool, but I am not blind. I can see clearly through the game. It has been nothing but a gigantic swindling operation on the part of Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince, as they call him. There is nothing princely in such schemes, but the magnitude of their meanness. He has engineered New Ophir up, and has engineered it down, and I will guarantee that he has come out of the collapse with full pockets. Nothing will be said of him, because he is a rich man; but I wish I had the rewarding of him!"

"You are excited, Rose, and perhaps you may be unjust to a man of whose acts and motives you know so little. Let me make you a nice warm posset, and then we will sit down and try to talk of this matter calmly."

When Rosina visited her broker's office the next morning, she took her seat at the "ticker" and ran over the tape, but saw no record of New Ophir.

"It is no use, Miss Rosina," said Mr. Hoxie. "I suppose you are watching the New Ophir flurry; but it is at an end now. That stock is not worth a cent in the market, and I doubt if you will ever see it quoted again. It is flatter than any flounder. The bottom has fallen out of it completely."

"And it has carried me down into the depths," she sadly replied.

"I never knew of a worse smash. But we are all liable to such calamities. Here is a letter for you, Miss Rosina, that a messenger left here this morning."

Rosina opened the letter. As she read it, her face under her veil assumed expressions of surprise and bewilderment, and then of sudden joy.

After some further conversation with the broker, she rose to take her leave.

"I thank you for this letter, Mr. Hoxie," she said. "It has given me a pleasant surprise. I was going to ask you to sell some Nevada Silver stock for me, but believe I will defer it."

"You had better hold on to that stock, young lady. Everything is in its favor just now."

When Rosina entered her room at the hotel that afternoon, and laid aside her hat and veil, there was such a serene joy in her countenance as made Mrs. Outram stare.

"What has happened now, Rose?" asked the old lady. "You look as if you might have found a gold mine, or something better."

"This is a world of chance, dear auntie, and it is sometimes hard to decide whether our blessings are not calamities, and our calamities blessings. I have brought you the biggest kind of news."

"How big, my love?"

"Bigger than the new post-office here, bigger than Stewart's store—as big as Mount Shasta. I have found out something more about the New Ophir failure—for it is a dead failure, auntie, flat and complete. The blow has not struck down many people, as the stock was in a few hands. Besides myself and Buck Farley and the San Francisco folks, whoever they are, there was but one heavy holder, and he owned more than half the stock. Now, who do you suppose that man is?"

"How can I guess, my dear?"

"It is Pedro Rosalba!"

"Pedro Rosalba?"

"The very same, and the smash has flattened him completely. Just think of it! The owner of more than half the stock of New Ophir, and every dollar of it a dead loss to him! I wish I could see him and congratulate him."

"Is your joy over the calamity of another so great that you can forget your own misfortune?"

"I can rejoice at his calamity with my whole heart. It is a judgment, auntie, and we may give thanks for judgments. And I am not so unfortunate, after all. Read this letter, which I got at Mr. Hoxie's office to-day."

"Please read it to me, Rose."

"It is from Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince."

"The man you were abusing so terribly last evening?"

"Yes, auntie; but I am not abusing him now. Listen to what he says:

"MY DEAR MISS ROSINA:—

"I must throw myself upon your mercy, and at the same time give you a little of my confidence, trusting that you will treat this communication as entirely confidential."

"I learn that you have been badly bit in the New Ophir disaster, and possibly you may blame me for your losses."

"The failure of the New Ophir mine is total, and the loss necessarily falls on the stockholders. Circumstances compelled me to unload, and thus help to break the market; but I do not consider myself a loser."

"I inclose my check to your order for \$50,000, which, I believe, will cover your unfortunate investment. You must accept it, as I assure you that it is justly your due."

"Yours very respectfully,

"BUCK FARLEY."

"And here is the check!" exclaimed Rosina, flourishing that valuable bit of paper before the face of her friend.

"Mercy on us! Are you sure it is real? Will you accept it, Rose?"

"Of course I will. I do not understand all that he says; but I am convinced that he has been playing a game, and that I was not the one he wanted to beat. When he tells me that this sum is justly my due, I am bound to believe him."

CHAPTER XI.

"WAR TO THE KNIFE!"

THERE was high revelry at the Rosalba ranch. Pedro Rosalba, the manager, if not the owner of that extensive estate, had given a grand entertainment in honor of the great event of his life—his acquisition of a controlling interest in the New Ophir mine.

This had been the prime object of his ambition. To attain it, besides investing all his available cash in the stock of the mine, he had sold all the cattle on the ranch except such as were needed for breeding purposes, and had borrowed money at a high rate of interest. Indeed, he had stripped himself of all his possessions—or his wife's possessions—in the way of personal property.

His guests—ranchmen, cattle dealers, miners, and speculators—had eaten and drank of his good cheer, had congratulated him on his good management and good fortune, and had gone away wondering if it was possible that the Mexican had made a fool of himself.

Some of them were privately of the opinion that if the mine was so very valuable a piece of property as he believed it to be, the Bonanza Prince and his wary old partner would not have allowed the control of it to slip out of their hands.

No doubts or misgivings troubled Pedro Rosalba as he sat with his wife among the ruins of the feast.

They were both a little mellow with wine, in high good humor with themselves, and extravagantly pleased with their position and prospects.

"It is a great thing," he said, not by any means for the first time. "It is actually immense. I have wrested the control of that mine from those sharp Yankees, and it was as grand a stroke of business as has been done in these parts for a long time."

"But you do not own the entire property," suggested Senora Rosalba.

"I own the controlling interest, and the man who has that in these stock companies has everything. The minority has no rights, and it will not be long before I ouster the other suckers out of their shares. I was here before this mining business began, and I have kept my eyes open while it was growing up."

"It has cost us a vast amount of money."

"Yes, it has been a squeeze, but I have pulled through. That last block of stock I bought at high figures; but I was obliged to have it, and now I am as good as proprietor of the New Ophir mine. I shall work it for all it is worth, Lucia, and we will soon see who is a bonanza king."

"Are you sure it is so very valuable, Pedro? Some mines turn out badly."

"There is a mint of money in this one, *cara mia*. Do you suppose that those men, Farley and Warne, would have taken hold of it if it had not been a bonanza? Everything they touch turns to gold. The ore that has been taken out already is immensely rich, and the vein has hardly been opened."

"How did they happen to let so much of the stock get out of their hands?" asked Senora Rosalba.

"I was too sharp for them, my Lucetta. They thought they could speculate with the stock and still hold it; but I picked it up and kept it. Our fortune is made, *mi alma*."

"Then we can drop this lonesome ranch and the nasty cattle."

"Yes, we can drop them all."

"And Rose will be welcome to the land, if she ever comes to claim it."

"I suppose so—if she ever comes back."

Leon, who had grown to be a young man, entered with a telegram which a rider had brought from Death Gulch station.

"Tell him to wait," said Rosalba, "until I see what is in it."

As he read the message his face turned purple, and then ashy pale. Drops of perspiration stood on his brow, and his countenance expressed intense surprise and terror.

"What is the matter, Pedro?" asked his frightened wife. "What is that message?"

"It is from my broker in San Francisco. He tells me that there are bad rumors afloat about New Ophir; that stock is being sold at a low figure, and that Farley is unloading. He asks me if he shall sell. Sell? Of course he should not sell. The market is breaking, he says; but I see through the game. It is a Yankee trick, an attempt at a sharp swindle. Farley and Warne see that they have been outwitted, and want to get back their stock. They have paid my broker to do this, hoping to frighten me into selling. But I have the old Castilian blood in my veins, and am not so easily scared. I will answer this at once, and will order him not to sacrifice my stock under any circumstances."

Although Rosalba spoke so confidently, and sent off such a bold dispatch, he passed a sleepless night. The bare possibility of such utter ruin as the San Francisco telegram suggested excited him almost beyond endurance.

In the morning he was astir at an early hour, and rode to Death Gulch, where he sent dispatches southward and eastward.

The answers which he received in the course of the day told him that the case was far worse than his wildest fears could have painted it.

There was no longer any market for the shares of New Ophir, and the stock which he had acquired at such a cost was as worthless as so much waste paper.

He was dazed and bewildered. He could not believe the facts that stared him in the face. It was impossible for him to realize the sudden and utter ruin that had overtaken him. It was like the stories of fairy gold, gathered at night, which had turned to withered leaves when the morning came. His fortune had vanished, and nothing was left him but a pile of valueless lithographs.

Yesterday he had considered himself a bonanza king; to-day he was a pauper.

He had never entered the office of the Death Gulch mine. As he was engaged in the task of "beating" Messrs. Farley and Warren, he had refrained from visiting them, lest their sharp Yankee wits should spy out his game.

Now he determined that he would call on them and demand an explanation of the collapse of New Ophir, if there had really been a collapse.

He was politely received at the stout stone office, and was informed that both of the partners were absent. Mr. Farley was at the East, and it was not known when he would return.

Mr. Warne was in San Francisco, but was daily expected home.

He rode back to the ranch like a man in a dream. One thought only presented itself to his mind clearly—how should he break the news of the disaster to his *cara Lucetta*?

She read it in his face as soon as she saw him. She led him into the house and placed a chair for him, in which he seated himself as if he was stupefied.

"Was it all true, then?" she asked.

"All, and more. The New Ophir mine is a failure, the stock is worthless, and I am ruined."

She could not cheer him; but she encouraged him to tell her the whole story, and he told it, not very clearly, but plainly enough for her to comprehend it.

"Then you are not a bonanza king, and I am not a queen," said she. "The castle in the air has tumbled down, and nothing is left but a hole in the ground."

"So it seems. It is hard to realize, but it must be so. The savings of years have been swept away, and we have now nothing but the land."

"And that belongs to Rose Warren?"

"Does it?"

"Of course it does. You know that it is her property, as her father left no will, and that she can claim it under the law."

"The law has not much to do with this stretch of land," remarked Rosalba.

"But it will have. The country is settling up rapidly, and soon there will be plenty of courts and judges. There is but one thing that can save us now from being thrown out of everything in our old age. Manuel must find Rose Warren and make her his wife."

"He is looking for her."

"But he is making no progress. You must help him to find her."

"I will, and when I lay my hands on her she shall not escape me again. I will do more than that. I mean to be revenged upon the men who have put me in this hole. I shall give them such a dose as will sicken them."

"If you do not, you are no sort of a man. But you had better be careful, Pedro, how you measure your wits against those sharp Yankees."

"It will not be a contest of wits, my Lucia. There are rougher, readier and surer means. I know plenty of bravos who will follow where I lead. I will strike those men in many ways, and every blow shall count. It shall be war to the knife!"

"Now you are talking like a man of sense and nerve. When you speak of the knife and the pistol and the rifle, you speak of weapons that you know how to use. Use them, Pedro, and while you work your revenge, you may get back at least a part of what you have lost."

"I have sworn it, Lucia. It shall be war to the knife!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE GREEN GUARD.

THERE were but two passengers in the Warneton stage, and they were women.

There had been two or three male passengers, but they had dropped out on the way, and only the two women were left to occupy the inside of the stage.

This was a peculiar circumstance in itself, and more peculiar from the fact that the route had become a dangerous one to travel.

The stage line was owned by Farley and Warne, who were interested in the new town of Warneton, and had started the line for the purpose of building up their property there. They ran an express on the route, being responsible for the valuables they carried, and some people were of the opinion that the daring band of road-agents who had lately been operating against the stages must have a special spite against their owners.

Already the stage had been stopped several times, and twice the express had been robbed, entailing a heavy loss upon the proprietors.

Of course the two lone women could not have been aware of these facts, though they heard such hints as they came along as might well make them nervous. But they had come from the far East, and nothing had harmed them yet, and they hoped to reach their journey's end in safety.

"This is a tedious trip, Rose," said the elder of the two.

"Yes, auntie; but everything is so new and strange that it is almost delightful to me. I wish you had my youth and health, so that you could enjoy it as I do."

"It is not only tedious, my dear, but dangerous."

"That is the spice of it. I dearly love a taste of danger. I should think that you, auntie, who drove Manuel Vincente from your door at the muzzle of a pistol, would be the last to speak of danger."

"Don't laugh at me, Rose. You know that I was nearly frightened out of my wits. But I could fight even a wild beast that would try to take me from you. I do hope that we will safely reach Warneton, if that is the name of the place, and that we will find there something fit to eat and a decent bed to sleep in."

"No doubt of that, auntie. I am told that it is quite a nice little town. And our fortune is there, you know. I am crazy to get my fingers on the Little Ruby mine."

"To think that you should actually be the owner of a mine! It seems so strange."

"All due to luck and Buck Farley, principally the latter. The Bonanza Prince must have thought that he owed me something, as he has done so much for me under the rose since that rough deal in New Ophir. After my splendid stroke in Nevada Silver, for which I consider myself indebted to him, he let me into the Little Ruby, sending me a note to tell me that it was a valuable property to be sold for a song. I sung to the tune of twenty thousand dollars; but that is nothing to what the value of the mine must be."

"If it should prove to be all your fancy paints it, my dear, still we are women, and we can't be bonanza kings."

"But we may be queens or empresses, auntie."

At the nearest station to Warneton—the nearest, though fifteen miles away—the stage made its last stop.

The station was but a small house on the plain; yet there were six passengers waiting for the stage, and, to the surprise of Mrs. Outram and Rosina, they were all women!

Six women! Six tall, awkward, "gangling" creatures, with such ugly and ill-fitting gowns, such horrid coal-scuttle bonnets, and such thick and clumsy veils!

"Can these horrid persons really be women, auntie?" asked Rosina.

"Hush, my dear! maybe they are Mormons."

Five of these outlandish women crowded into the interior of the stage, where they adjusted themselves rather awkwardly, and the sixth climbed up on the seat with the driver, and the heavy vehicle lumbered away.

The new passengers kept their veils down; but Rosina could not complain of that, as hers was drawn closely. They had nothing to say, though she tried to draw them into a conversation by asking a few questions, to which they replied briefly and gruffly.

"What coarse voices they have!" whispered Rosina. "Did you ever hear the like?"

Mrs. Outram suggested that they might be the wives of some Mormon elder, who compelled them to seclude themselves from "the world's people."

"I do believe they wear boots, auntie, and they are more like men than women."

"I am sure that I wish they were men, my dear."

"So do I. I confess that I am beginning to feel shaky."

Rosina's shakiness developed into positive nervousness as the sun was setting, and the stage rolled down a hill into a heavy piece of timber.

Suddenly there was a knock, or a kick, on the front of the vehicle, that attracted instant attention.

Mrs. Outram screamed, Rosina shivered, and the five other inside passengers straightened themselves up, and began to handle awkwardly their outlandish gowns.

Then there was a hail without—a man's voice, in clear and commanding tones, clearly heard by the passengers—and the stage came to a stop.

"Fling down that express box, and be quick about it!" ordered the same commanding voice.

"Thar ain't none here," said the driver.

"The—ther ain't! Cuss yer stage owners for a set of sneaks! We'll go through the passengers, then."

"Hain't got nothin' but women," said the driver.

"Thunder an' benzine! Trot them out, boys, and go through them for all they're worth. Come down from the box, you two, and step lively. We've no time for foolin'."

A hurried glance showed Rosina a number of rough-looking men about the stage, masked and armed with rifles and revolvers.

The two doors were flung open, and the passengers were ordered forth.

The five outlandish women gathered up their skirts, and stepped and stumbled out of the vehicle, and the robbers hardly seemed to know whether to be most amused or dismayed.

"This beats me!" exclaimed the leader. "It's a touch above any tea party I ever struck. It's no use, boys, to tell these critters to hold up thar hands, and I reckon the wealth they kerried would sca'cely do to start a bank on. But thar's no tellin'. Go through them, boys!"

Mrs. Outram and Rosina had crouched down in a corner of the stage, not because they hoped to escape unobserved, but because of an instinct that prompted them to hide.

"Come out o' that!" was ordered in a rough voice; as a bearded brute looked in and saw them.

Suddenly they were startled by quick and continuous discharges of firearms without, mingled with oaths, shouts and yells.

This sharp and rapid firing lasted not more than three minutes, and then all was quiet.

Moved by an irresistible curiosity, Rosina raised herself on the seat, and looked out.

The outlandish women had disappeared. In their place were half-a-dozen men, all clothed entirely in green, and wearing green masks. Besides these men in green, and two bodies stretched on the ground, there were visible only the driver and one man who was evidently a prisoner.

Directly the six men and their prisoner hastened away, and were soon lost to sight in the timber.

The driver, with a pleased expression on his countenance, pitched into the stage the ugly gowns and horrid bonnets that had been worn by the six women passengers.

"It's all right, ladies," he said, answering Rosina's look of inquiry. "You are safe enough now."

"Who were those men?" she asked.

"Them's the Green Guard, miss. They's Buck Farley's men, who came along to clean out the road-agents, and they did the job up in mighty good style. Now we'll git to Warneton in a jiffy."

CHAPTER XIII.

NUMBER ONE.

THAT portion of the encounter between the Green Guard and the brigands which Rosina did not witness had been more interesting than the scene that happened to come under her view.

The six women passengers, when they were ordered out of the stage, had taken their positions, as if by a preconcerted arrangement, in a line facing their foes, and a nod or gesture from their leader served them as a command. The sneers and jeers of the rough men about them had no effect upon them, and they stood there, silent, unmoved, and impressive in their ugliness.

"Who the deuce are you, anyhow?" rudely demanded the chief of the brigands.

"We are the wives of elder Quisby, of Salt Lake City," replied she who had sat upon the box, in a cracked falsetto.

"If you half-dozen heifers have got any pockets, just turn them inside out, and save us the trouble of searching you."

"We are under the protection of the Lord, and the ungodly cannot harm us."

"We'll see about that. Go for 'em, boys!"

"Sisters," said the tall female, "let us unite—"

Under their ugly gowns they were able to draw and cock their revolvers without being perceived.

"In prayer!"

This was the signal, and the fire from six revolvers flashed in the faces of the astonished outlaws.

So rapid was the firing, and so deadly was the aim of those outlandish women, that the brigands could not pretend to face it. With yells of terror and screams of pain those who could use their legs turned and ran.

"Stop, you cowards!" shouted their leader, who had not been hit. "Are you going to run from a lot of old women?"

But the old women, as soon as their firing had produced the panic they desired, jerked off their gowns and bonnets with the celerity of a "lightning change artist" in a variety show, and there stood six stalwart men, clothed in a uniform of dark green, and wearing green masks.

"The Green Guard!" exclaimed the outlaw chief, and he, too, darted away into the timber.

The men in green had not allowed their transformation scene to interfere with their operations, and they secured from the general flight one prisoner, who had stumbled and fallen as he turned to run.

"You may go on now, Jonas," said the leader of the Green Guard to the driver of the stage. "Tell Mr. Billings that he may send what express freight he chooses on the next trip."

Two of the men in green took the prisoner by the arms, two led the way, and two brought up the rear. Thus they moved through the timber, silently and in military order, until they had crossed a ridge and descended into a glen where six horses were hitched.

Here they mounted, the prisoner being tied behind one of the men, and rode away under the starlight, silently and swiftly.

The course they were taking was not leading them toward Warneton, and the prisoner grew uneasy.

"Are you takin' me to jail, strangers?" he asked.

"We are jail enough for you," answered the leader.

"Ain't you goin' to give me up to the law?"

"We are the law," was the stern reply.

Then he could easily guess at his doom, and knew that no efforts of his could avert it.

The men in green finally came to a halt near the edge of the fearful chasm of Death Gulch.

Here they hitched their horses, and formed in a circle round the prisoner.

The moon had risen, and illuminated the bare plain and the scattered rocks and boulders, but only deepened the darkness of the abyss. It shone upon the dark forms of the Green Guard and the moveless figure of their prisoner. It also lighted up weirdly a large tree standing

near the edge of the chasm, from which a large limb reached out ominously over the gulch.

"Bill Saunders," said the leader of the party, "you have been caught in the act of trying to rob a stage. No proof is needed, as we all know that you are guilty. Have you anything to say for yourself to show why you should not be hanged?"

"I never did it afore," began the prisoner, with a doleful whine.

"That is a lie. The same gang stopped the stage several times this season, and you were with them every time."

"I mean ter say that I never did it afore I jined 'em. And they made me jine 'em. They forced me to it. I couldn't help myself. Let me off, boss, and I will leave this yere kentry, and never come in sight of it ag'in."

The leader shook his head.

"It 'ud pay you to let me off," persisted Saunders. "I kin make it wuth yer while, an' no mistake. Let me slide outen this, an' I'll tell you the names of the gang an' who's at the head. It'll 'stonish you a heap, an' I'll let you into all the games they're up to."

"We know every man of them," coldly replied the leader. "Bill Saunders, you have said nothing to show why you should not be hanged."

"Please don't hang me!" begged Saunders, piteously. "I ain't fitten to die. Have mercy, and don't hang me!"

"Did you ever have mercy, Bill Saunders? Look around you, and think where you are."

The prisoner gave one glance around. Then he drooped his head and shuddered.

A rope was passed over the large limb of the tree at the edge of the gulch. One end was held by four of the men in green. A noose at the other end was fitted on Bill Saunders's neck, and he was stood up under the limb, just at the brink of the chasm.

The leader of the party pinned a paper upon his breast and stepped back.

"Bill Saunders," said he, "if this had been your first offense, or even your first season of unlawful work, there might be a chance for your life. But you are also here now to atone for another and greater crime—the crime of murder."

"Who did I ever murder?" whined the miserable wretch.

"You remembered that deed when I told you to look around. On this very spot—how many years ago was it?—you and three other merciless fiends launched into that bottomless abyss a man who was bound and helpless in your hands. That man was named Edward Dorlon, and he had never done you any wrong."

"Who told you that?" screamed Saunders.

"It's a lie! You can't prove it!"

"I am the man, and I have come up from the grave to accuse you."

The doomed man writhed until the noose tightened around his neck.

"Take me away!" he entreated. "Whatever you do, don't hang me here!"

The leader raised his hand, and the four men at the rope ran up their helpless victim until he dangled over the abyss.

Then the rope was made fast to the tree, and the men in green mounted their horses and rode away.

On that same night Pedro Rosalba was aroused from his sleep at a late hour by two riders, who brought with them a man who was badly wounded.

He let them in at once, cursing as he listened to the tale they told in as few words as possible.

A bed was prepared for the wounded man, and he was made as comfortable as possible. No physician was sent for, though one might have been brought from Death Gulch. His needs were attended to by Rosalba, his wife, and by the two men who had brought him there.

When he had done what he could for the sufferer, Rosalba went down stairs, and listened to the story which the two men told him at length. His brows were dark, his temper was moody, and his words were none of the sweetest.

Senora Rosalba joined the conference, which lasted until a late hour of the night, or rather, until an early hour of the morning.

Shortly after the two men left the ranch, and while Rosalba and his wife were discussing the news they had brought, one of the cowboys came riding up in a state of great excitement. His usually ruddy face was pale, and his accents were full of terror.

"What is the matter with you, Martin?" demanded Rosalba. "What brings you here at this time in the morning?"

"Oh, senor, such a sight! May I never see the like again!"

"What sight is that?"

"It's at Death Gulch, senor—not the town, but the gulch itself—where a large tree hangs over the cliff!"

"But what is it, you chicken-hearted block-head? What have you seen?"

"A man is hanging from that tree, senor. I could not see his face plainly; but I thought it might be Bill Saunders."

"It must be Bill Saunders," said Rosalba, turning to his wife. "Rafferty said that they had seen nothing of him since the fight, and supposed him to have been killed or captured. The Green Guard have taken him, and have strung him up. Oh, they shall pay dearly for this night's work."

"But why should they carry him to the Gulch?" asked Senora Rosalba.

"That is more than I can tell you. Call two more men, Martin, and bring me my horse. We will go and take him down."

The sun was rising when Pedro Rosalba and his three companions reached the Gulch, the cowboy who had brought the news to the ranch hanging back as if he feared to see that dreadful sight again.

It was anything but a pleasant spectacle to the others—that of the man swinging there from the branch of the tree, lifeless, and with discolored face, and with the buzzards hovering over his head.

In spite of his distorted and blackened features, they easily recognized the hanging form as that of Bill Saunders, and speedily performed the unpleasant task of lowering him and removing the rope from his neck.

A paper was fastened upon the dead man's breast, and Pedro Rosalba turned pale and trembled as he read these words:

"NUMBER ONE."

"What does that mean?" he asked, in a hoarse and unnatural whisper. "Number One! What other numbers are to follow?"

"Look a-yere, boss!" exclaimed one of his companions. "Yere's suthin' mighty queer."

Rosalba stepped to where the man was bending over a flat gray stone, imbedded in the ground near the edge of the cliff, and in the morning's light he read this inscription:

"SACRED TO THE MEMORY
OF
EDWARD DORLON,
Who Died Suddenly
NEAR THIS SPOT."

A date followed—a date which Pedro Rosalba had good reason to remember.

"Yere's another of 'em," said another man, and on the other similar stone he read a similar inscription, with a different date, and with the name of Henry Warren in place of Edward Dorlon.

As he rose from the ground his face was ashy pale, and his stout frame shook like a leaf.

As he spoke, the hollow tones of his voice showed intense emotion.

"Take Bill Saunders away from there, and bury him as soon as you can."

He mounted his horse, and rode away, as one of the men described it, "as if the devil drove him."

CHAPTER XIV.

A FAMILY QUARREL.

SINCE the disastrous failure of the New Ophir speculation the married existence of Pedro Rosalba and his Lucia had not been a happy one. In fact, they had led a cat and dog life. She blamed him not only for the actual losses incurred by that speculation, but for the downfall of the high hopes that she had builded upon it, and was continually "throwing it up to him" and "charging him with having been the ruin of the family."

For they were practically ruined. The ranch still yielded them a living; but the greater part of their personal property had been swept away, and they sorely felt the lack of the comforts and luxuries they had enjoyed during so many years.

It is true that welcome sums of money had lately come into their exchequer as the result of one of the speculations which Rosalba had undertaken, outside of the law, with the view of replenishing his purse and crippling "those Yankees," Farley and Warne; but the most of the profits had gone to the more active partners in the enterprise, who did the work and took the risks, and the short but decisive campaign of the Green Guard seemed to have struck a deadly blow to brigandage, considered as a business.

When he came galloping home from Death Gulch, "as if the devil drove him," Senora Rosalba was eager to learn what he had seen and done there; but he was so badly shattered, physically and mentally, that she could get nothing coherent from him for a while, and it was not until he had fortified his system with fiery draughts of whisky that he could summon courage to speak.

"What is the matter with you, Pedro?" she demanded. "Have you got to be such a white-livered coward that the sight of a dead man can throw you into a fit?"

"It was not the dead man alone," he replied. "It was Number One!"

"Number One! Are you crazy, man? What do you mean by that?"

"On Bill Saunders's breast was fastened a

paper, and on that paper was written *Number One*."

"What of that? It means, I suppose, that they have made an end of one of the gang, and have labeled him Number One."

"I am afraid it means more than that, Lucia. The tree from which Saunders was hanging stands over the spot where that Yankee, Dorlon, went over the gulch."

"Surely you are crazy. What has that to do with your Number One?"

"Near the tree we found a flat stone, like a tombstone, and it was marked to the memory of Edward Dorlon, who died there suddenly, and the date was given."

"*Santissima madre!*" exclaimed Senora Rosalba. "That is strange, indeed. Who can have done it? But I do not yet see what it has to do with the paper on the dead man's breast."

"There were four of us, Lucia, who pitched that fellow into the gulch, and Bill Saunders was one of the four. He is Number One. Who will be Number Two?"

"It ought to be you, you craven idiot. If the fool-killer of whom these Yankees talk were to come this way, you would go off suddenly. Do you suppose that Dorlon has come to life, after having been thrown into that bottomless pit? Or do you fancy that his ghost is wandering about Death Gulch, carrying heavy stones, cutting words on them, and hanging people?"

"Lucia, do you know what he said before we swung him off? I told you, but you have doubtless forgotten it. I shall never forget one word. I have wished to forget it, but cannot. This is what he said:

"*I warn you that from this night henceforth you will be marked men. You shall yet pay the debt you owe me, and, living or dead, I will be on hand for the settlement.*"

"Living or dead!" mused Senora Rosalba.

"He cannot be living, and the dead do not return. He was trying to frighten you, Pedro. If he did not succeed in scaring you then, he has put a scare on you now that bids fair to last through your life."

"You may make sport of this, Lucia; but what does it mean, if it is not a vengeance?"

"Bah! You make me sick. You are getting childish as you grow in years. This is nothing but what is called—what is the word, now?—a coincidence. Bill Saunders was caught robbing a stage, and was hanged by the Green Guard. That is plain enough. The stone must have been placed there by some friend of that fellow Dorlon. Who could it have been? Benito was strangely fond of him, and you told me that he was there when the accident happened to the young man. May it not have been Benito who placed the stone?"

Pedro Rosalba poured down his throat another strong dose of whisky; but it did not change the deathly paleness of his face.

"Another stone is there, Lucia, and the story it tells is one of which Benito could have known nothing."

"What story is that?"

"The other stone is marked to the memory of Henry Warren, who also died suddenly on the same spot, and the date of his death is given."

It was Senora Rosalba who then shivered and turned pale, and in her turn she resorted to the whisky bottle for strength.

"Henry Warren!" she exclaimed. "My husband! This is news to me. I was never told how he died. Was he, also, thrown into Death Gulch?"

"What did you suppose had become of him?" demanded Rosalba, his spirits rising as those of his wife fell.

"I did not know. He disappeared. I supposed he died a natural death. How should I know?"

"You never asked, because the riddle was too easy to guess. You know that I would not have married you if I had not been sure of his death. To be sure, I was obliged to make sure."

"So you killed him," she exclaimed, fiercely. "You threw him into Death Gulch. Oh, you murderer!"

"Murderer?" replied Rosalba, with a sneer. "You should not throw stones at me that fall back upon your own head. If I am a murderer, what are you? As Dorlon died, so did Henry Warren, and in the death of each of these I only carried out your wishes and obeyed your orders."

"Oh, you sneak!" exclaimed the infuriated woman. "You are a coward, to try to saddle your misdeeds upon me. I never consented to the death of my husband. I wish he had not died. I hated him because he was a Yankee; but he was a man, and he would never have stripped me of everything and left me to starve, by rushing headlong into crazy speculations of which he knew no more than a child."

"You approved the speculations, and encouraged them," replied Rosalba.

"I did not. I trusted in you, and believed what you said, because I supposed you to be a man, instead of a blundering blockhead and a cowardly fool, who is weak enough to hire others to work the revenge which he is afraid to seek for himself."

Rosalba replied angrily, and one word led to another, until they were quarreling as hotly as

any drunken husband and his wife ever wrangled in a hovel or tenement-house.

This scene of domestic discord was interrupted by the arrival of a man who was an entire stranger to both of them.

He was a brisk-looking man, no longer young, and yet not far enough advanced in years to be called middle-aged. He was dressed in a style of seedy gentility, wearing a high hat, that was by no means new, and a black frock coat, buttoned up. In his left hand he carried a bundle of printed papers, and his right hand was extended oratorically as he entered the room without knocking or announcing himself.

"Let us have peace," he said, spreading his mouth in a bland smile, as he halted. "With malice toward none, and with charity for all, let peace prevail in this mansion."

"Who the devil are you?" demanded Rosalba, turning upon him angrily.

"No devil, most sapient signior, but an angel of beneficence, come to pour upon these troubled waters the sweet and sacred oil of science and philosophy."

"Curse your impudence! What do you mean by walking into this house without an invitation?"

"Permit me to introduce myself. Parmenas Pratt, at your service, Master of Arts and Doctor of Philology, formerly editor of the Banner of Health and president of the faculty of the Universal University of Eclectic Empiricism."

"What are you, anyhow—a corn doctor, or a traveling assayer?"

"More and better than either, most noble Castilian. I am at present the sole proprietor and manager of the great moral and scientific cabinet of wonders, known as the Magnostereopticon, which has been exhibited with unbounded enthusiasm before the crowned heads of Europe and the effete aristocracies of the ancient empires of Asia, Africa and Australia. Hearing of the exalted attainments of your excellency, and of the beauty and grace of her excellentissima, I have come to give you an opportunity of assisting at that unparalleled entertainment, for one night only, at the Grand Opera House, in the neighboring town of Death Gulch. I have the honor to offer you a circular, sir. Favor me by accepting one, madame."

Rosalba glanced over the circular, which proved to be an extravagantly worded announcement of a magic-lantern exhibition.

"We don't take any stock in that sort of a show," said he. "We flatter ourselves that we are a touch above the two-bit trash."

"Two-bit trash!" exclaimed Parmenas Pratt. "A gentleman of your caliber should not mistake the character of this unequaled entertainment. If you will examine attentively the announcement, you will perceive that the charge for admission is six bits, children under ten half price, and I hope you have plenty of children, though mine ears have not yet been gladdened by the sound of infantile prattling. It would be a pity if a couple of such high position and such rare attractions should have failed to perpetuate their features for the benefit of posterity."

"Do take some of the tickets, Pedro," said Senora Rosalba, "if only to stop his tongue."

"Reserved seats one dollar, most gracious lady, and I assure you, upon my word as a gentleman and a scholar, that the entertainment is well worth witnessing."

Rosalba purchased two tickets for reserved seats, and Parmenas Pratt went on his way rejoicing.

"Is it to-night, my dear Pedro?" asked Senora Rosalba. "We will go there, and will forget our cares and sorrows. Why should we borrow trouble and fret about fancied dangers? As that man with the limber tongue said, let us have peace!"

"We will go, *mi alma*, to witness this small exhibition with the large name."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MAGNOSTEREPTICON.

THE style and quality of the Grand Opera House of Death Gulch did not justify the sounding title that had been conferred upon it. It was merely a shanty of unusual size, no better than a barn as to its exterior, its sides built of planks standing on end, but with a false front as high as the ridge pole. The green timber had shrunk so that outsiders could steal glimpses of the mysteries within, until the enterprising proprietors put a stop to the free sight by nailing battens over the cracks. The interior was gorgeously whitewashed, and a raised platform supported a wall paper procenium and some rudely painted scenery.

Although the opera house of Death Gulch had never witnessed a performance of grand opera, or even of comic opera, and no legitimate dramatic company had yet ventured upon the town, it had already been invaded several times by variety shows, sleight of hand performers, and the like, who had been liberally rewarded for the entertainment they afforded to the denizens of Death Gulch.

On the occasion of Parmenas Pratt's exhibition of the Magnostereopticon the hall was crowded. The aristocracy of Death Gulch and Warneton occupied the reserved seats, which

were chairs near the stage, and the benches were filled with miners, ranchmen, and citizens generally.

Pedro Rosalba and his wife were there, occupying a choice position near the front.

A large white sheet had been stretched across the stage, upon which the pictures were to be thrown, and the proprietor had stationed assistants at each of the coal oil lamps, to lower and raise the lights as the exigencies of the entertainment should require.

Parmenas Pratt, whose heart must have been rejoiced by the flow of cash into his treasury, stepped upon the stage at the time appointed for the opening of the exhibition, armed with a long wand. He was dressed as he had been when he visited the Rosalba ranch, and with the same grandiloquent flow of language which he had used in soliciting custom he made a speech to the audience, describing the nature of the entertainment, and announcing the necessity of darkening the room, that the effects of the Magnostereopticon might be fully appreciated.

The lights were turned down. Darkness is conducive to silence, and the hall was quiet when the exhibition began.

The show was a fairly good one of its kind. The pictures that were thrown upon the screen were mostly views of scenery and noted buildings in the new and old worlds, which were described in quite a graceful and interesting manner by Pratt, who pointed out the prominent objects with his wand, and interspersed his descriptions with many bits of accurate and valuable information.

Besides these views the exhibitor occasionally introduced a comic face or scene, upon which he kept up a running fire of comments that were at least as funny as the pictures themselves. As most of the figures had the power of motion and of sudden change, the effect upon the audience was exhilarating in the extreme.

The crowd was very well-behaved. It is probable that the darkness had a sobering influence upon them, and the lecturer complimented them as being the most orderly audience before whom he had had the pleasure of exhibiting in a long time.

Occasionally an uncouth comment or hearty expression of approval from some rough miner or ranchman greeted a view of special interest, and each of the comic scenes brought forth a general burst of uproarious laughter.

Pedro Rosalba and his wife enjoyed the entertainment hugely. Born and reared in California when it was a Mexican province, seldom had either of them seen any other life than that of the mountains and plains, and even a magic lantern show was a treat to them. They stared at the serious scenes, and laughed at the comic ones, as fully and freely as any cowboy in the crowd.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," said Parmenas Pratt, when the funniest of all his pictures had passed from the screen, "I shall have the honor of exhibiting to you some views and events of local attraction, which will doubtless be readily recognized by this immense audience. In the words of an eminent gentleman who dignifies the bistrionic profession in the city of New York, I shall present to you themes of contemporaneous human interest. Scene the first illustrates one of the natural wonders of this region."

The picture thrown upon the screen showed a bare and rocky foreground, reaching to what seemed to be the edge of an abyss, as all was blackness beyond, until the top of another cliff could be dimly distinguished.

"Death Gulch!" shouted a heavy voice in the rear of the hall.

"The second scene," said the exhibitor, "adds the element of life to the desolate view, and shows one of the possibilities of the locality."

On the screen appeared the same view of Death Gulch; but there were stars in the sky, and the figures of four men standing near the edge of the chasm, who held a fifth man, bound, and suspended horizontally in their arms. The faces of the four were turned away, but that of the fifth man was plainly visible.

"Henry Warren, by all that's holy!" was the shout that came from the rear of the hall.

This cry was followed by the murmur of many voices; but high above all rose the shrill scream of Senora Rosalba, who suddenly sprang to her feet, and fell back heavily into her chair.

As her husband turned to assist her, the picture passed from the screen.

"Be quiet, Lucia!" he said, in a hoarse whisper. "This is some cursed game, and we must not let it catch us."

"The third and last of these scenes of local attraction," said the exhibitor, "will close the evening's entertainment, and I take this opportunity to return thanks for your liberal patronage and kind attention."

The scene gave the same view of Death Gulch, with four men holding a fifth as if in the act of throwing him into the chasm. But the face of one of the seeming executioners, as well as that of their victim, was plainly visible to the audience.

"Ned Dorlon!" was heard from half a dozen voices in different parts of the hall.

"Pedro Rosalba!" was distinctly pronounced at the rear.

A hoarse oath came from the front seats, and a man could be dimly discerned there, struggling with a woman who sought to hold him.

"The transformation of this scene," said the exhibitor, "is of thrilling interest."

The man who was bound flew from the hands of the four standing figures, out into the blackness that showed the chasm.

At the same instant the report of a pistol rung through the building.

"Try again, my Christian friend!" said Parmenas Pratt, as bland as ever. "It is simpler than throwing me into Death Gulch."

Suddenly the lights were raised, the picture faded from the screen, and Pedro Rosalba was seen standing by his seat, with a smoking pistol in his hand.

Immediately an uproar arose in the hall. Men jumped on the benches, and pistols were drawn on all sides.

"Kill him!"

"Hang the old scoundrel!"

"Lynch the black-hearted villain!"

Such were some of the cries with which the hall resounded, and stalwart men with threatening looks and words began to crowd toward the spot where Pedro Rosalba still stood, the portly figure of his wife clinging to his shoulders.

Over all the confusion sounded the voice of Parmenas Pratt, in clear and commanding tones:

"Order in the hall! Men of Death Gulch and Warneton, let us have peace! Nobody is hurt, and the little accident which has just occurred is of no sort of consequence. I take it as a high compliment to my art and the excellence of my unparalleled exhibition, that my Christian friend has been so excited by its wonders as to forget himself and the company he was in. Let us separate, ladies and gentlemen, with feelings of amiability and mutual good will, and quietly retire to our virtuous couches, to dream of the glories of the Magnostereopticon. Again thanking you for your kind attention and liberal patronage, I wish you all good night."

The readiness with which the audience obeyed the speaker, putting up their deadly weapons, and peaceably filing out of the hall, proved his ability to pour oil upon troubled waters.

Pedro Rosalba was one of the last to leave the building, his portly wife hanging upon his arm, and partly shielding his person, as if she feared that the mob might yet attempt to tear him from her and hurry him to instant execution.

They entered their stout and clumsy buggy, which had been left near the hall, and drove away, followed by scowling looks and muttered threats.

"How could you do it, Pedro?" asked Senora Rosalba, when they were fairly out of the town.

"Why did you fire at that man?"

"I was crazy, Lucia. That cursed picture drove me wild. It is strange that I did not hit him, as my aim was as good as it ever was."

"He deserved to be killed, I am sure; but that was not the time or place for settling with him."

"It was all a game, Lucia, a deep and devilish game; but I will get to the bottom of it yet. The man must have been hired to show those infernal pictures; but who hired him? That is what I want to find out. There is somebody about here who knows a great deal more than he ought to know, and who is using his knowledge to crush me. That fact is growing plain or every day."

"Who can it be, Pedro?"

"That is the question. Who can it be?"

The horse was moving slowly, and just ahead of the buggy could be seen a man walking down the road in the moonlight.

As he approached the vehicle, he stopped, and asked to be directed to Death Gulch.

"Right down the road, as you are going," replied Rosalba.

He stepped toward the buggy, and its occupants observed that he was an old man, wearing a heavy beard, and with a slouched hat drawn over his face.

"It is the town of Death Gulch that I want to find," said he, "not the hole in the ground that goes by that name."

"I directed you to the town of Death Gulch," replied Rosalba.

"Many thanks to you both," said the stranger, as he raised his hat, and the moonlight shone full in his face.

Senora Rosalba screamed wildly, and fell back in the seat.

Pedro Rosalba's face turned ashy pale, and he brought down his whip with a fearful cut on the back of the horse, which dashed away at breakneck speed, while the clumsy vehicle rattled and jolted over the stony track.

The old man looked after them with a smile on his face, and then turned and walked down on the road.

In a few minutes he was joined by another man.

"Why, Warne," said the latter, "you seem to have given those good people quite a scare."

"Yes, my son. I am afraid they must have taken me for a ghost."

CHAPTER XVI.

A STREET ENCOUNTER.

Mrs. Outram and Rosina were located on the second floor of the Lincoln House in Warneton, and their windows commanded a view of the main (and only) street of that young but ambitious town.

They were much better pleased than they had expected to be with Warneton and with their accommodations. When the Bonanza Prince and his partner started to work a mine or build a town, they made a thorough job of it, and they well knew the value of a good hotel to a new settlement. Consequently the Lincoln House, which was their property, was a rather better hotel than Warneton was then able to support, or would be able to support for some years.

As Rosina was writing at a table in her room, which served her temporarily as sleeping apartment and office, Mrs. Outram entered in a state of "frustration."

"My dear Rose," she said, "it is a blessing that we did not go to the exhibition at Death Gulch last night. They had a terrible time there, and a pistol was fired in the hall."

"That is not such a very terrible thing, auntie. At least it is not unusual. Was anybody hurt?"

"Fortunately there was not. A man in the audience shot at the showman, and who do you suppose that man was? Rose, it was Pedro Rosalba."

"Pedro Rosalba? That sweet and tender step-father of mine? Why, auntie, you throw me into a perfect fever of excitement. What was the trouble? Why did he shoot at the showman?"

"I will tell you all about it, my child. I knew that you would want the full particulars, and I got the whole story from a man who was there."

Mrs. Outram proceeded to give a detailed account of the exhibition of the magnostereopticon, and the episode of the shooting, as viewed by the clerk of the Lincoln House, who had occupied one of the reserved seats.

"Henry Warren!" exclaimed Rosina, when that part of the narrative was reached, "why, that was my father. Was that the way he met his death? I have always believed—but no matter now what I have believed. The faces of those who held him, auntie—did you hear what men they were?"

"No. Their faces could not be seen. Mr. Sims did not know the face of Henry Warren, but it was recognized by more than one person in the audience."

"What was it, then, that led to the shooting?"

"That is what I am coming to," replied Mrs. Outram, and she went on with the story.

"I can see it now!" exclaimed Rosina, when the old lady was describing the third of Parmenas Pratt's "scenes of local attraction." "I know the man who was bound and helpless in that picture. Oh, auntie, was it not Edward Dorlon?"

"Yes, Rose. That was the name that was called out by several persons in the audience. And there was another face that was recognized—the face of one of the men who held him."

"Oh, yes! I can see it all clearly. It is easy enough to guess at that. The face was Pedro Rosalba's, and that is what caused him to shoot at the showman. But you say that nobody was hurt."

"Nobody was hurt; but Mr. Sims says that Pedro Rosalba would have been roughly handled by the crowd if the showman had not begged them to let him be."

Mrs. Outram gave the conclusion of her story in a few words.

"Oh, auntie!" exclaimed Rosina, who had risen, and was pacing the floor rapidly, "what a fearful thing this is! How vividly and terribly it brings back to me that wretched time when I lost my lover! I knew that he was slain by Pedro Rosalba, and that he met just such a horrible death as was shown in that picture. Benito told me about it—Benito, my only friend. He did not give me all the particulars—he could not, poor boy! as he was stricken down insensible before the fatal deed was done—but that must have been the manner of my dear one's death, and it is no wonder that Pedro Rosalba's conscience smote him—or his fears. You say that it is a blessing to us, auntie, that we were not there last night. It would have been a blessing to me if I had been there."

"Mercy on us, Rose! How could you have endured it?"

"It would have brought up the past fearfully; but I would be able to bear that if I could see the fright of Pedro Rosalba, and feel that some portion of the penalty that is his due is being visited upon him."

"I am afraid, my child, that your feelings are quite unchristian."

"Let them be so. They are at least natural. Can I be expected to love the man who murdered my love, who robbed my life of its choicest blessing? I hate Pedro Rosalba, and my greatest joy in living is the hope of witnessing the retribution that awaits him. What is that hullabaloo in the street below?"

She stepped to the window, raised an edge of the closed curtain, and looked out.

"It is he!" she exclaimed. "It is Pedro Rosalba! He is vamping about, and acting like a madman."

It was, indeed, Pedro Rosalba, who was raising a disturbance in the street of Warneton.

Half crazed by the sights he had witnessed at the exhibition of the Magnostereopticon, and by the subsequent appearance of the man or ghost on his homeward road, he had risen at an early hour in the morning, had armed himself, had taken on an extra load of liquor, and had ridden to the town of Death Gulch, with the wild intention of venting his spite upon somebody, and with the special purpose of calling Buck Farley to account for what he styled the New Ophir swindle.

At Death Gulch he was informed that the gentleman he was seeking had gone to Warneton, and to Warneton Rosalba proceeded, after taking on an additional load of whisky.

At Warneton he began to make the rounds of the barrooms, drinking at each, and openly proclaiming his purpose of forcing a settlement with the Bonanza Prince, whom he loudly accused of being a swindler.

By this time the liquor he had drank had heated his blood and fired his brain, until he talked and acted, as Rosina said, like a madman. He rushed out of a barroom, and strode down the street, frantically calling for Buck Farley, and announcing his intention of demolishing that individual on sight.

In short, he was "on the rampage," and peaceable people got out of his way, while those who were inclined to war adjusted their weapons, and made ready to "get the drop" on him if his fighting intentions should turn in their direction.

The Bonanza Prince in the mean time had stepped into the saloon attached to the Lincoln House, where he was immediately surrounded, as was often the case, by a motley crowd of citizens, ranchmen, miners and loafers, who thronged around him, shaking his hand, greeting, congratulating and questioning him.

He stepped to the bar, and laid a twenty-dollar bill on the counter, inviting the crowd to "partake," and they accepted the invitation with the utmost alacrity.

"Hurrah for Buck Farley!" shouted a stalwart Irishman. "He's the man who stands in widd the b'yes. Here's good luck to our nixt Sinator!"

Amid the cheers and the clinking of glasses the young millionaire saw his way clear to quietly escape, and he had reached the door when the hoarse voice of Pedro Rosalba was heard without, calling for Buck Farley, and daring him to show his face.

"That means me," said the Bonanza Prince to a friend who accompanied him. "I must go and see what the man wants."

"That man is dangerous, Farley," said his friend. "He wants to take your life. Are you well armed?"

"Sufficiently so for the present purpose," replied Farley, as he stepped into the street.

Pedro Rosalba was striding toward the hotel, looking wildly about.

"Where is Buck Farley, the swindler and pirate?" he shouted. "I don't want any of you small fry. It is a big game I am hunting to-day. Bring out your Bonanza Prince, and let me put a crown on his head!"

"Have you any particular business with me?" was asked, in a mild but manly voice.

The Mexican, turning, saw a well-dressed man approaching him, with his hands at his side.

"Are you Buck Farley?" he demanded, as he raised his pistol.

"I am."

The sharp report of a pistol followed; but it was not Pedro Rosalba who fired.

The Bonanza Prince had drawn a revolver with the quickness of thought, and had fired with so true an aim that his bullet struck the barrel of Rosalba's pistol, and sent it whirling through the air.

"Are you sure that I am the man you want?" he asked, as he stepped up to his antagonist, and looked him fairly in the face.

Pedro Rosalba threw up his hands, shrieked, and fell backward to the ground.

"He is not hurt," said Farley to the men who had crowded around. "He seems to be crazy drunk. Take care of him, some of you, until he recovers."

The Bonanza Prince put his pistol in his pocket, and walked away.

CHAPTER XVII.

A QUESTION OF BUSINESS.

ROSINA, who had witnessed this scene from behind the curtain, tottered away from the window when it was ended, and sunk, gasping, into a chair.

"What is the matter, dear love?" asked Mrs. Outram, hastening to her side. "Rosalba has not been killed. I heard Mr. Farley say that he was not hurt."

"It is not that," faintly replied Rosina. "I was not thinking of him. The man who fired the shot—"

"You know that he is safe. You saw him walk away unhurt."

"Oh, auntie, he resembles so much—so much—"

"Whom does he resemble, dear child?"

"I did not see his face; but his form, his walk, his action, reminded me so forcibly of my dear, dead love, Edward Dorlon."

"You ought not to encourage such fancies, Rose. These accidental resemblances often occur, and you must be prepared to meet them. Of course you cannot for an instant suppose that a man who was so foully murdered so long ago may now be living and a millionaire mine owner."

"Of course not, auntie; but there is so much that is so strange."

Mrs. Outram brought her a glass of wine, and begged her to drive the unpleasant subject from her thoughts; but Rosina persisted in speaking of Edward Dorlon and Pedro Rosalba.

"What can be stranger," she asked, "than that exhibition last night! Were not those pictures brought forward for the purpose of producing an effect upon Pedro Rosalba? Of course they were. Any other supposition would be absurd. But who has done it? Who is it that knows so much of those terrible events, which I had believed to be secrets to all but the murderers and their victims? Whoever it is, he is my friend and Pedro Rosalba's enemy."

"I am sorry, my child, that your lot should have fallen in the midst of such exciting scenes. Even in San Francisco you were continually in fear that you would be discovered by your relations, or by some person from this region who would recognize you; yet you have come here of your own free will, among the very people whom you have regarded as your worst foes."

"It is fate, auntie. It is the will of Heaven, and who can fight against that! When I was strangely favored by fortune, and led on to the purchase of the Little Ruby mine, I did not know that it was located here, so near to the place where I was born."

"But now that you do know it, Rose, you can leave the mine, or hire some good man to manage it, and we can go away."

"I do not want to go away," insisted Rosina.

"I have drifted here, and am content to remain. I am not disposed to fight against fate. Besides, auntie, I feel braver than I did, and more confident. It seems to me that there is a power at work—I do not know who or why or how—that is doing more for me than I could do for myself, and I am almost ready to believe that I can rely upon it for protection against all manner of enemies. Why, auntie, if I could have worked my will upon Pedro Rosalba, what could I have done that would have been more to the purpose, than the swamping of his speculation in New Ophir, and the remainder of his evil deeds that he got at the exhibition last night?"

Mrs. Outram shook her head sadly.

"I am afraid, my child," she said, "that you are being led away by strange fancies."

"I hope not. I am sure that I feel wonderfully strong and confident. Come in!"

This invitation was in response to a knock at the door, and one of the servants of the hotel entered, bringing a card, which he handed to the young lady.

"Jacob Hornby!" she joyfully exclaimed, as she rose from her seat. "Auntie, our good and kind friend Hornby is here! Send him up at once, please."

The boy disappeared, and soon returned, followed by that well-fed, full-faced, and pleasant-mannered gentleman who had loaned the speculating Rosina such a considerable sum in San Francisco.

Rosina ran to meet him, giving him both her hands, and Mrs. Outram's face and words also expressed her joy at seeing him.

"My dear Hornby," said the young lady, "you are more welcome than flowers in spring. No surprise could have been pleasanter than this. Do sit down, and make yourself at home. I was so anxious to see you immediately, that I could not stop to change my dress or to frizz and primp."

"I would have known nothing of the change of dress if it had been made," replied Hornby. "As for frizzing and primping, that could hardly be worth while, as I see that you continue to wear that odious veil, the necessity of which I could never understand."

"I assure you, my dear friend, that it is more necessary than ever at this place and time, as you will admit when I tell you my story."

"Your story!" exclaimed Hornby. "I would be very glad to hear it."

"I hope that you will, before long, if you have patience to listen to it. But I am anxious to know what it is that has brought you so far from your cosy office and your beloved business."

"Why, Miss Rosina, when you wrote to me that you had bought the Little Ruby mine, it was natural that I should want to come up here and help you run it."

"Was that what brought you?" she asked,

gleefully. "You shall have any chance you want, then. Suppose you take a partnership in the mine."

"Well, now, that is a matter of business, and we will consider it at our leisure. I must confess that it is quite another matter of business that has brought me into this region, though you were, of course, an extra attraction. Since I had such good luck in lending you that fifty thousand—"

"Oh, you precious usurer!" broke in Rosina. "You don't know how near you came to losing your money."

"I do know that I got it, and that the transaction paid me well. As I was going to say, I have become quite a money-lender. Shortly after you left San Francisco I made the acquaintance of a young man, a member of an old Californian family, named Manuel Vincente."

Rosina started, and could not wholly suppress an exclamation of surprise.

"Do you know him?" asked the broker.

"I have heard of him. Never mind that at present, but go on and tell me about him."

"I thought you must have some sort of an acquaintance with him, as he was asking me about you. In fact, he introduced himself to me for the purpose of making inquiries concerning a young lady who was doing business in San Francisco under the name of Rosina. But your note had warned me to keep a still tongue about you and your affairs, and of course he got nothing out of me on that point."

"Of course, my dear Mr. Hornby, I knew that I could trust you."

"I should hope so. Well, in course of time it turned out that the young man wanted to borrow a pile of money on a big cattle farm up here, that belongs to his uncle, Pedro Rosalba."

Rosina started again.

"Do you know the place?" quickly asked Hornby.

"I know something about it. Have you lent the money?"

"Oh, no—not at that distance. But he offered me such a high rate of interest, and it seemed to be such a promising speculation, that I thought it worth while to come up here and look after it, and at the same time to look after you and the Little Ruby. Now, Miss Rosina, if you know any thing about the place and the parties, I hope you will kindly give me some points, as I should dislike above all things to lose money by a Mexican."

Rosina reflected. She had no doubt that Pedro Rosalba, having been crippled by the crash in New Ophir, was seeking to raise money by the pledge or sale of the ranch, and she was business woman enough to know that the property, in all probability, belonged to her.

She might say to Hornby, "That is my property, and you can get no title to it from Rosalba," but that statement would render necessary such an explanation as she was not yet prepared to make.

"You know something about the place or the people," said the broker, observing her hesitation. "I think you ought to tell me frankly what it is."

A sudden thought struck her. It seemed to be an inspiration, and perhaps it was.

"Go to Buck Farley," said she. "He is a good business man, and I believe him to be an honest man. He is well acquainted about here, and can advise you."

"Where will I find him?"

"He was in Warneton a little while ago. If he is not here now, you will find him at Death Gulch."

"I will hunt him up right away."

"I would like to know what advice he gives you. When you have seen him, will you come back to me?"

"I will."

It was not until night that Jacob Hornby returned to Warneton and called on Rosina.

"I have seen Mr. Farley," he said.

"What did he tell you?" asked Rosina. "I am very anxious to know."

"I am sorry to say that it is a secret."

"Indeed! That is very strange."

"As you have a secret in connection with this matter, Miss Rosina, I suppose I may have one, too."

"Of course you may. But there is one thing I ought to know. Did he tell you that it would be safe to lend the money?"

"Well, I may say that I am not likely to be swindled by any Mexican. I shall see Pedro Rosalba in the morning. When I have seen him, I will come and consult with you about the Little Ruby."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANOTHER BLOW.

On his return from his unsatisfactory search for Buck Farley, Pedro Rosalba was completely crestfallen, and went into a fit of the sulks.

When he described to his wife his encounter with the Bonanza Prince, he knew that she would treat him scornfully; but he was prepared for that.

"And so you fainted dead away," she said, "at the mere sight of your foe. I had not supposed you to be such a coward as that."

"Wait a moment," said Rosalba. "There are some things which will strike down the bravest of men. Do you believe that the dead can live again on this earth?"

Her tone changed as she thought of her own experience.

"What do you mean?" she asked, feebly.

"Do you remember what you saw as we were coming home from that cursed exhibition?"

"I have tried to shut it from my memory, Pedro, but cannot. It was a dream, a phantom, an accidental resemblance."

"Perhaps it was. I do not pretend to say what it was. But I know what an effect it had upon you. To-day, when that man had shot my pistol out of my hand, he stepped up and faced me, and what face do you suppose I saw?"

"Not—"

"Not your dead husband, Lucia, but another dead man."

"Another?"

"If it had been a few years younger, and had not worn a heavy beard, it would have been the face of Edward Dorlon!"

"*Santissima madre!* What is coming to you?"

"I don't know that it can be much worse than has already come. Whatever it is, it seems to be something that we cannot fight against. I am now wondering who will be number two. You may call me a coward if you will; but it was that face, Lucia, that struck me down."

"But you are a man, Pedro Rosalba, and you ought not to be afraid of anything living or dead, in the present or in the past."

"I am not afraid, and you shall yet admit that I am no coward. I will make the best fight I can make, though I may be fighting against fate."

Before the day was done, Rosalba and his wife were greatly cheered and strengthened by an arrival at the ranch—the arrival of no less a person than Manuel Vincente.

He brought with him the marks of dissipation, but the air of success. A keen and unscrupulous gambler, he had made his tour pay, and was well dressed and confident, with the gold pieces of the Yankees jingling in his pockets.

But he had sad and strange news to bear. He had been duly informed of the New Ophir disaster, but had yet to learn of the successive blows that had fallen upon the Rosalba family.

As those unpleasant facts were related to him, his countenance fell. The state of affairs was far from being such as he had expected to find.

The story of the death of Bill Saunders startled him. He also was interested in the question, who would be number two? The subsequent events, which had so shocked and astounded his relatives, were equally shocking and astounding to him, and he did not pretend to understand them.

But, when he had heard the worst, he pulled himself together, and declared that something must be done.

"We must make a different sort of a fight," he said; "a strong, bitter and merciless fight. We must assault the camp of the enemy, and give no quarter. For this we will need money, and it is a good thing that I have been lucky in my travels."

"But you seem to have had no luck in the most important matter," said Senora Rosalba. "You have not brought Rose back. Have you found her?"

"Yes. That is to say, I got on the trail of a girl whom I believed to be Rose. But I had no sooner spotted her than she fitted, and I could not learn where or in what direction she had gone."

"Where did you find her?"

"In San Francisco. She was quite a business woman there, speculating in mining stocks, and making a good thing of it. She always went heavily veiled, and was known as Rosina."

Pedro Rosalba struck the table before him with his fist.

"Then we've got her!" he said. "She is now here, or in Warneton, which is but a few miles from Death Gulch. She has lately become the owner of the Little Ruby mine, and is living at the Lincoln House. If that woman is Rose, we can take her, and compel her to yield to our will. But, as you said, Manuel, we will need money."

"I have arranged for that, uncle Pedro. I have brought here a San Francisco speculator and money-lender named Hornby, who is ready to lend you money on the ranch if you can show a satisfactory title, and I believe I can manage that. He will come to see you to-morrow morning."

Jacob Hornby rode up to the Rosalba ranch the next morning, and was graciously received by Manuel Vincente and his uncle, who set refreshments before him, including a liberal supply of wine and liquor.

But the man from San Francisco would neither eat nor drink, and his manner, though bland and cheerful, was not such as to encourage the would-be borrowers.

"Have you thought over the matter of business we were talking about?" asked Manuel.

"Are you ready to make the loan I had contracted for?"

"Not yet," replied Hornby. "I have made a few inquiries, and am compelled to say that I am not altogether satisfied with the security."

"Oh, we can satisfy you on that point. There may be a slight cloud on the title, but it can easily be cleared away."

"But the cloud that I have seen, Mr. Vincente, is not a slight one. It is strictly an adverse title. I have been shown a deed to this property, and it is not a deed to yourself, or to Mr. Rosalba, or to his wife."

The thoughts of the Rosalba family at once settled on Rose Warren, whom they believed to be living in the neighborhood under the name of Rosina. It must be she who was responsible for this new complication.

"Who has dared to attempt to deed away this property?" demanded Pedro Rosalba. "If the deed you speak of is signed by a young person named Rose Warren, it is worthless, as she, if she is living, is not yet of age."

"The deed is not signed by Rose Warren," replied Hornby.

"There can be no other person who has even a shadow of a claim to the ranch. I hope you are not joking with us, Mr. Hornby."

"Indeed I am not joking. I am telling you the simple truth. The man who made this deed seems to have been able to show a clear title to the land."

"A man? Who was he?"

"The name signed to the deed is Henry Warren."

This name fell upon the Rosalba family like a thunderbolt. Senora Rosalba shrieked, and her husband's dark face turned livid. Manuel Vincente sat as if he was stupefied.

Jacob Hornby, bland and cheerful as ever, waited patiently for them to recover from the shock.

"It is an imposition!" exclaimed Senor Rosalba. "When was this pretended deed dated?"

"September 10, 1872."

"It is the clearest possible case of fraud. Henry Warren died more than ten years before that date."

"Are you sure that he did?" calmly asked Hornby.

"Of course he did. He disappeared, and nothing has since then been heard of him. He is supposed to have lost his way at night, and to have fallen into the great chasm near here which is known as Death Gulch."

"Did you or any other reliable person see him die?"

"Oh, as to that I have told you all I know. There can be no doubt that the man was dead long before that deed was dated. Nobody in the neighborhood doubts it."

"But the deed I speak of, Mr. Rosalba, raises what I must call a strong doubt. It is duly witnessed and properly authenticated."

"It is a forgery, sir, a base forgery, and I shall see that the forgers are punished. Who claims the property under that deed? To whom does it pretend to have been given?"

"Buchanan Farley, commonly known as Buck Farley."

"Buck Farley! Shall I never hear the last of that man?"

The consternation of the Rosalba family was complete, and Jacob Hornby did not attempt to increase it by adding a word.

"It is all a fraud," said Pedro Rosalba at last. "It is a plain and palpable fraud. If that man Farley, whom I believe to be nothing but a swindler on a large scale, believed that he had a good title to this property, would he not have laid claim to it long ago? Yet this is the first we have heard of his pretended deed."

"That is strange," replied Hornby, "and I cannot undertake to explain it. But I have seen the deed, and that is enough for me."

"Then you refuse to go any further in the business?" asked Manuel.

"Of course I do."

"I suppose you will want your expenses paid, all the same."

"You need not trouble yourself about that, Mr. Vincente. I think I shall be able to clear my expenses here. Good-morning."

When Jacob Hornby returned to Warneton, Rosina thought that he looked as if a weight had been taken from his mind.

"I have not lent the Mexican any money, Miss Rosina," said he, "and I am not likely to. If you are still in the mind to sell me a share in the Little Ruby, I am ready to talk business."

CHAPTER XIX.

JUMPING A CLAIM.

WHEN Rosina and Jacob Hornby had had their talk, it was settled that the firm name of the proprietors of the Little Ruby mine should be Jacob Hornby & Co., and the young lady was glad, as many other ladies are who are not business women, to have "a man at the head of the house." The arrangement was also highly satisfactory to Mrs. Outram, who had a good opinion of Hornby, and believed that "her Rose" was hardly fitted for the business of running a mine.

With Hornby's capital and energy the work of reopening the Little Ruby and making a

fresh start was at once begun, and proceeded rapidly, the indications being good and the partners hopeful.

"I believe I have succeeded in getting a good superintendent for the mine," said Hornby one morning.

"Anybody I know?" asked Rosina.

"I suppose not. His name is Parmenas Pratt."

"Is not that the man who gave an exhibition at Death Gulch a while ago?"

"So I am told. He is a sort of strolling character. But he seems to be a sensible and capable man and he is well recommended by Farley & Warne."

"If they recommend him he must be the right man. I would like to make his acquaintance."

"You shall do so, of course. But I have a complaint to make against you."

"What is that, sir?"

"Miss Rosina, I have been taken in."

"As a partner. Yes."

"Taken in and done for is what I mean."

"Mercy on us! What is the matter?"

"When you sold me an interest in the Little Ruby you did not tell me there was a hostile claim on the mine."

"I could not have told you so, Mr. Hornby, as I knew nothing of the kind. Nor do I know it yet."

"Read this document, and you will be wiser. It was left at the mine yesterday, and I got it this morning."

The "document" was a half-sheet of foolscap, on which this notification was written, in a fair hand:

"To whoever may be claiming, occupying or working the Little Ruby mine:

"You are hereby notified that the lead you propose to work in the so-called Little Ruby mine belongs to the New Ophir mine, of which I am the proprietor, and that any working of the same by you is unlawful, and will not be allowed.

"You are therefore ordered and required to quit and abandon the same within twenty-four hours from the receipt of this notice, and deliver possession of the same to my agent, or suffer the consequences of your refusal to do so.

PEDRO ROSALBA.

"M. RAFFERTY, agent and witness."

"Pedro Rosalba!" exclaimed Rosina.

"Yes. It seems that we both know him. He is the same man who made a big strike in New Ophir, and got swamped. Naturally he wants to get even on somebody. The same man, also, who tried to swindle me out of my money, and failed. Do you propose to obey his order?"

"Of course I do not. I would sooner cut off my right hand and throw it into the fire. What possible claim can he have on the mine?"

"Well, the abandoned shaft of New Ophir adjoins us. That's as near as I can get to it. But I regard his action as a piece of unparalleled impudence. He wants to spite me, I suppose, because I refused to lend him money. Any man can make mischief, if he is mean enough to do it, though he has not a shadow of right on his side."

"But the law will protect us," said Rosina.

"It won't do to trust to the law, and there is precious little of it about here to trust to. We must do as other people do, and fight for our rights."

"Fight?"

"Yes. It is a common thing in this country for a scoundrel to jump a claim, and the rightful owner, if he is not able to defend himself, is likely to lose his stake."

"But I am not a fighter, Mr. Hornby, and I doubt if you are."

"I don't pretend to be. But we can hire men to fight for us, as the other side will probably do. I must go out to the mine and learn whether we can rely upon the miners to stand by us if the Mexican tries to drive us off."

"I will go with you."

Mrs. Outram put in a vigorous protest against this proceeding; but Rosina's will was too strong for her, and Hornby was of the opinion that there could be no danger as yet. So the young lady mounted a horse, and rode with her partner to the mine.

They reached the mine near the close of the afternoon, and found Parmenas Pratt in charge. Rosina was manifestly pleased with his appearance, as he was a bright and active man, seeming to have plenty of spirit and determination.

They had some difficulty in getting to the mine, which was located at the mouth of a glen, as the passage was choked up with bowlders, which the miners were rolling up, instead of being employed at their usual work.

"What are you trying to do, Mr. Pratt?" asked Hornby.

"Well, sir, there's no telling what may happen, and I thought it best to prepare for trouble by throwing up a sort of fortification."

Mr. Hornby took Rosina into the mine, and pointed out to her the work that had been done and that which was about to be undertaken. Then they returned, and inspected Pratt's fortification, which was a substantial one, and only needed to be properly manned to become formidable.

"How about the miners, Pratt?" asked the

senior partner. "Can we rely upon them, in case we have to fight?"

"I suppose so, sir; but I have not yet put that point to them plainly."

"I will do it now. We must know where we stand."

Hornby made a little speech to the men present, reading Rosalba's notification, explaining the position of affairs, and asking them if they would stand by the owners in the defense of the mine.

It was at once apparent that something was the matter with them. They looked at each other, and moved about uneasily.

"What is the matter?" asked Hornby. "You shall be well paid for your services. Speak out plainly, and let us know whether we can depend on you."

The men shuffled about, and looked at one whom they seemed to regard as their leader.

"I don't know how 'tis with 'others," said this man at last; "but I'd a heap rather live than die, and I wasn't hired fur fightin'."

"Nor I," said each of the others.

"As it's about knockin' off time," continued the leader, "I reckon we mought as well quit right now, and go home."

Not a word was said to detain them, and they put on their coats, and silently left the mine.

"That is a cowardly and shameful desertion," said Rosina.

"I think I understand it," remarked Hornby.

"Those men have been tampered with. In plain words, they have been bought up by the enemy, who has paid them to leave us in the lurch. I am afraid that we have begun to move in this matter a little too late."

Rosina looked at Pedro Rosalba's notice to quit, and then glanced at her watch.

"It seems to me," said she, "that the twenty-four hours allowed us by this notice must have run out."

Hornby, after a brief consultation with Parmenas Pratt, admitted that she was probably right on that point.

"But that would make little or no difference with the men we have to deal with," he said.

"This does not pretend to be a legal proceeding, and I presume the notice was intended only for outside effect. If Rosalba and his gang mean to clean us out, they won't stand on any sort of ceremony, but will strike when they can do us the most damage with the least harm to themselves. What are you doing, Mr. Pratt?"

"Just piling up a few more stones, sir. The smaller the garrison, the more protection it will need."

"What! Do you expect to remain at the mine?"

"That is what I am here for, Mr. Hornby."

"But they will come in a crowd, if they come at all, and you will soon be wiped out."

"Until then, sir, I will do my best."

"You are a very brave man, Pratt, or a very stubborn one. As you are so determined, I will stay with you. Miss Rosina, I am sorry that I shall be unable to escort you home. But I will lead out your horse, and as he is very fast I have no doubt that you will have a safe ride back to Warneton."

"You may leave the horse where he is," replied Rosina. "I will not need him yet a while."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this—as Mr. Pratt is going to stay here to defend the mine, and you are going to stay to defend Mr. Pratt, I shall stay to defend you."

"My dear young lady, think of the danger! You are no fighter."

"No more are you. You told me so a while ago."

Hornby endeavored to persuade her to return to Warneton; but his words had no effect upon her whatever.

"You have known me long enough," said she, "to have learned that I have a will of my own, and that when I have determined to do a thing I am not likely to change my purpose. If one partner stays, he ought to have the support of the other, and neither of us ought to desert Mr. Pratt, if he is resolved upon sacrificing himself. By the way, Mr. Pratt, how are you off for arms and ammunition?"

"There are two breech-loading rifles here, and two revolvers, with a good supply of cartridges."

"How fortunate! And I have a good revolver of my own, and a hand bag full of cartridges. I thought that we might get into some sort of difficulty, and came provided."

Hornby shook his head, sighing, and went to work to help Parmenas Pratt complete his fortification. But he soon got enough of lifting stones.

"That is high enough and strong enough," said he. "We mustn't strain our muscles at these stones, Mr. Pratt, until we make ourselves too nervous to shoot straight."

He put on his coat, and sat down by Rosina. Twilight was ended, and the stars were coming out.

"Hark!" said Pratt. "They are coming!"

The trampling of horses was heard at a little distance, and then it seemed that the riders had halted, and were dismounting.

"Now comes the tug of war!" said Rosina.

CHAPTER XX.

NUMBER TWO.

THE approaching party, whoever they were, could be seen as they made their way toward the mine. As many as a dozen could be counted, and there were probably more.

It was a heavy force to be met by two men and one woman, and Hornby looked sadly at the forlorn hope.

That they must be "wiped out" was far too evident.

But there was plenty of determination in the pale countenance of Parmenas Pratt, and Rosina handled her revolver as if she were both willing and able to use it.

"They are moving cautiously," said Pratt. "I suppose they know that we are here, and just how many of us there are. Our rascally miners have told them."

The advancing band halted, and a man stepped out in front of them, and hailed:

"Hello, the mine!"

"Hello, yourself!" replied Hornby. "Who are you, and what do you want here?"

"We want that mine. You got the notice yesterday. Are you ready to give it up?"

"It is our property, and we give it up to no robbers."

"You had better give it up peaceably, or you will get hurt."

"You may be murderers, as well as robbers," replied Hornby; "but there is a hereafter for this sort of thing."

"We are not to be scared by talk. Last chance now. Are you going to give it up?"

"No!"

The spokesman stepped behind a rock, and at the same moment his companions disappeared from view.

Again Jacob Hornby looked upon the forlorn hope, and sighed audibly.

"I think you had better take command, Mr. Pratt," he said. "I put myself under your orders."

"Very well, sir. I can only advise you to keep yourself well under cover, and to use your rifle to the best of your ability, firing as fast as you can if they make a rush. As for the lady, if she will fire off her pistol in the air, or any way to make a noise, it may help to give them a big idea of our numbers."

"Indeed, sir," proudly replied Rosina, "I shall fire at the enemy, and shall take good aim, too."

As she spoke, she threw back her veil, and her face, pale and animated, gave a new luster to the starlight.

It was the first time Jacob Hornby had seen that face, and it was a revelation to him. He gazed at it with an intensity of admiration.

"I am no fighter," he said; "but I will fight to the death here—not for the mine, but for you!"

"For God's sake keep under cover, Miss Rosina!" implored Pratt. "Your eyes are a better mark than a deer's eyes in a still hunt."

She smiled upon them both, just as a rifle-shot from without broke the stillness, and the bullet whistled near her head.

Parmenas Pratt replied to the shot, and the unequal battle began.

The claim-jumpers were unexpectedly cautious, if not unreasonably so, considering the odds in their favor in point of numbers. They had probably been told by the absconding miners that their opponents, though few, were well armed and well protected, and were unwilling to risk their lives rashly to gain what might be more safely secured by patience.

They kept at a pretty safe distance from the fortification, sheltering themselves nearly as well as the defenders of the mine were sheltered, and from behind rocks and trees maintained a steady, but not a rapid fire, to which their opponents made a lively reply. Jacob Hornby, after a few shots, handled his rifle like an old campaigner, and Rosina fired her pistol frequently through a chink, and at least did her share of making a noise.

The bullets rattled against the stone wall, and hummed through the air as they flew over it, and the sulphurous smell of burned powder added to the excitement of the scene.

"This sort of thing is not what I had looked for," remarked Pratt. "They must be trying to tire us out."

But it soon became evident that they were trying to do something more than that. It could be seen that those who were firing on the fortification were fewer in number than they had been, and that they were drawing nearer by cautiously advancing from cover to cover. It was reasonable to suppose that they were protecting a more secret advance of their friends on one flank or both, who had ceased firing for a time.

"Yes, they are stealing up to make a dash," said Pratt, as he fired ineffectually at a man whom he saw darting from a rock to a tree.

"Oh, that night or Blucher would come!"

"What nonsense is that you are talking, Pratt?" asked Mrs. Hornby.

"I was wishing for an earthquake or the Green Guard," replied Pratt.

"The Green Guard?" exclaimed Rosina.

"Oh! if we could hope for that!"

The defenders reserved their fire, and watched for good chances, as it was clear that they were accomplishing nothing by rapid shooting.

"You had better have your pistol handy, Mr. Hornby," said Pratt. "We may expect a rush now at any minute, and then may God help us!"

The firing from the front increased suddenly, and the party that was advancing there came forward more swiftly.

"Here they come!" said Hornby.

"Not that way!" exclaimed Pratt. "Look to the right or the left! I am afraid that—ah!"

What he would have said was choked off by a man who had climbed the wall at the side of the glen, and had fallen over upon him. A rough and tumble struggle ensued, with Pratt the under dog in the fight.

Another and another came over the wall, and still they came!

Hornby emptied his revolver among them, and received a shot in the left shoulder which rendered that arm useless.

Rosina, astonished by the sudden onset, and dazed by the rapid firing, had scarcely recovered her senses when she was shocked by the face of a man who leaped over the wall.

It was the face of Manuel Vincente.

She hastened to pull down her veil; but his look of malignant triumph showed that he had already recognized her.

"This is my game," he said, as he stepped toward her.

The words were hardly out of his lips when Hornby's fist struck him on the cheek, knocking him down.

Rosina raised her revolver, just in time to see her defender shot through the heart by a man who followed Manuel.

The next moment that man fell under the fire of her pistol.

As she looked around she was startled by a rattling volley of rifle and pistol-shots, and she could not tell from what quarter it came.

It was followed by yells of pain and cries of terror on the part of those who had just captured Parmenas Pratt's fortification.

Manuel Vincente, who had picked himself up, ran off as fast as he could, crouching as he went and darting from rock to rock.

There was a similar stampede on the part of his followers.

"I feel as if I would faint," said Rosina to herself. "But that would never do. I must see the end of this."

She braced herself against the wall, and saw a number of dark forms rushing about in pursuit of the flying raiders. Directly she saw that they were clothed in green, and wore green masks. Then a thought flashed upon her mind.

They were the Green Guard, and she was safe!

This assurance was made sure by the appearance of Parmenas Pratt, who approached her with a smile on his face; but his countenance changed as he looked down and saw the dead body of Jacob Hornby.

"The poor, dear, brave man!" said Rosina. "Help came a moment too late to save him."

One of the men in green stepped up to her and touched his hat with a military salute.

"I am very sorry, madam," that this has occurred," said he. "We did not believe that this attack would be made so soon, or we would have been on hand to aid you."

"I owe you my life," faintly replied Rosina.

"Bring out this lady's horse, Mr. Pratt," said the stranger, "and take her back to Warneton. One of my men will ride with you. Excuse me, madam, for leaving you so abruptly; but an urgent duty calls me away."

At a later hour of the same night the rising moon again saw the Green Guard grouped near the tree with the outreaching arm that stood at the edge of Death Gulch.

In the midst of the group, with a rope around his neck, the rope being also passed over the outstretching limb, stood a bound and helpless man, pale and trembling. His face showed that he was an Irishman.

"Sure an' it's a small thing to be hangin' a man fur, gentlemen," said he. "I've got a most a-jumpin' of claims, an' I only acted under orders."

"It is a hanging matter, Mike Rafferty, and you know it," replied the leader of the Green Guard. "It is a hanging matter to rob a stage, to rob a mine, and to add murder to robbery. But those are not the only crimes you are here to account for."

"Phwat else have I been doin', boss?" inquired the Irishman.

"Look around you. Do you know this place? I see that you do. On this very spot you and three other fiends held in your arms a bound and helpless man, who had done you no wrong, and threw him into the bottomless pit of Death Gulch."

"It's a lie!" shrieked the culprit. "I never did it! You can't prove it!"

"Your innocent victim called you by name before he was thrown over, and warned you that he would return, living or dead, to bring you to account for that crime."

The Irishman's face was livid, and his voice sunk to a whisper as he spoke again:

"How do you know that? Who are you?"

"I am the man you murdered," replied the leader, as he removed the green mask from his face and stepped forward.

The drawing rope stifled a shriek, and in another moment Mike Rafferty was hanging from the limb over Death Gulch.

When Parmenas Pratt called on Rosina the next day, she had an important question to ask him.

"Who was the leader of the Green Guard, Mr. Pratt—the man who spoke to me last night?"

"I cannot tell you, Miss Rosina. I did not see his face."

"But he knew your name."

"I am a sort of public character, you know."

"I wish I could find out who he was, Mr. Pratt. His voice was so strangely, so wonderfully like that of a dear friend of mine, who is dead."

"I am sorry that I cannot inform you, Miss Rosina. But I have a bit of news for you. I have just heard that the Green Guard captured one prisoner last night, and this morning he was found hanging from a tree near Death Gulch."

"Who was he?" she eagerly asked. "Manuel Vincente?"

"Not Manuel Vincente. He was an Irishman, named Mike Rafferty, and on his breast was pinned a paper, on which were written the words 'Number Two.'"

"Number Two!" exclaimed Rosina. "What does it mean? Wait a moment. Let me think. Bill Saunders and Mike Rafferty. I knew those men, and I have good cause to remember them. Bill Saunders and Mike Rafferty! Number One and Number Two! I wonder who will be Number Three!"

CHAPTER XXI.

STRIKING BACK.

At the distance of some thirty miles from Death Gulch was situated the Small Hopes mine, controlled and partly owned by Farley & Warne.

It had been pressed upon them by an old prospector named Durkee, who was a special friend of John Warne's. He claimed that he could prove it to be a rich lead, if he could get capital to work it. They had bought an interest, and had named it Small Hopes, because they had small hopes of its success, retaining Durkee as manager.

A few miles from the mine was a railroad station, a small and lonely building, occupied by one man, who acted as station agent and telegraph operator.

At an early hour one morning this building was suddenly entered by three men, masked and heavily armed, who seized the agent and bound him.

Then one of the raiders, who seemed to know very well what he was about, sat down at the instrument table, and sent off a message, the captive agent being placed too far away to listen to the ticking.

This was all. There was no robbery, and no attempt to injure person or property.

When the message had been sent, the operator *pro tem.* arose and examined the railway time table.

"We will leave you as you are until the next train comes along," he said to the agent. "You will not be likely to suffer before somebody turns you loose. I wish you good-morning and a patient wait."

At the office of Farley & Warne in Death Gulch only one of the partners was present that morning, Buck Farley having gone some distance to the north on business of the firm.

At the telegraph office in Death Gulch the operator was called by the station near the Small Hopes mine.

"Marsh must be sick to-day," said he, as he noticed a "hand" to which he was unaccustomed. "I wonder where he got his sub."

He received the message, wrote it off hastily and put it in an envelope.

"Here is bad news for Farley & Warne," he said, as he handed it to his messenger boy. "Hurry over there with it."

The telegram was handed to John Warne as he sat at his desk, and this is what he read:

"FARLEY & WARNE,

"Death Gulch:

"Small Hopes tunnel has fallen in, and the timbers are burning. Captain Durkee is badly injured. Come immediately."

John Warne handed the message to the managing clerk.

"Mr. Farley must know of this as soon as possible, Runnels," said he. "Write a dispatch, and send it to the nearest station, with directions to forward it to Bluffton."

"Are you going to Small Hopes, sir?"

"Right away. Poor Durkee! I am not troubled about the mine; but he must be attended to. I will just have time to catch the train."

He hurried away, and Runnels sent off the dispatch to Buck Farley.

The train had been gone but a little while

when a large man, wearing an overcoat and a slouched hat, came to the door of the office of the Death Gulch Mining Co. After lounging about for a few minutes, he stationed himself on the door-step.

He was evidently a stranger to the town, and the porter, who was also the guard, did not like his looks, and inquired his business.

"I ain't doin' any harm here, am I?" stiffly replied the stranger.

"Mebbe you ain't, and mebbe you are; but I want to know what you're here for."

"You needn't be so uppish about it. I ain't likely to steal your durned old buildin'. I'm jest a-waitin' fur a man who promised to meet me here at nine o'clock."

As this was a legitimate reason for remaining, and the man could not be driven away merely because he was a stranger and his appearance was unsatisfactory, the porter said nothing more to him, but kept a suspicious eye upon him.

There was a short and narrow lane that ran down a ravine, and terminated near the office of the Death Gulch Mining Co.

It was seldom traveled, as there were no houses in that direction, except a shanty that was occupied as a saloon.

As the proprietor of the saloon stood at the end of his bar that adjoined the window, moodily eying his one customer, a bumner who was waiting for a free drink, and occasionally casting a glance at the dirt-covered panes, his large ears caught the unusual sound of horses coming down the lane.

He vigorously rubbed with his fist one of the dirty panes, until he could dimly see what was going on down the street, and counted fifteen horsemen riding slowly down the lane, in military order.

As they drew nearer, he saw that they were all masked.

"What's up now?" he muttered. "Some durned galoots goin' to try to take the town?"

As soon as they had passed the saloon they broke right into a gallop.

The barkeeper ran around his counter, and looked out at the door.

The bumner waked up enough to mutter, "Don't keer 'f I do," and then wanted to know "Wasser masser?"

The horsemen had halted in front of Farley & Warne's stout stone building.

As the horsemen came down the lane they were out of the view of the porter, but were plainly seen by the stranger on the step, who rushed in at the door when they broke into a gallop.

"What do you mean?" demanded the porter. "Clear out o' this!"

"I'm skeered. Thar's a ruction out thar."

"Git out of the way, you durned galoot, and let me see!"

But the form of the large stranger blocked the way, and the next moment the fifteen horsemen halted in front of the door.

Five of them instantly dismounted, throwing their bridle reins to their companions, and rushed in at the door, where the porter was struggling with the stranger.

A blow on the head with the butt of a pistol ended resistance in that quarter, and the raiders poured into the office.

The clerks had run for the weapons in the racks; but they were too late.

Runnels, who had seized a rifle, was settled by a bullet in his head, and the others, overpowered by leveled revolvers, were driven into a corner, where two of the raiders guarded them.

The others hastened to ransack the office, and their leader sought in Runnels's pocket for the key of the safe.

Finding it, he compelled one of the clerks who knew the combination to open the safe, and all the valuables it contained were speedily hustled into bags, and handed out to the men in the street.

His companions in the meantime were pulling open and breaking open desks and drawers over the whole office, and similarly stuffing into bags all sorts of papers, valuable and valueless, with no examination or any sort of inspection.

In short, the sack of the office was complete, and the havoc that was raised with the furniture made it look as if a tornado had struck it.

Of course such an audacious raid could not be begun and carried through without raising considerable excitement in the town of Death Gulch. The town was always easily excited, and this occurrence was calculated to throw it into a frenzy.

The report spread like wild-fire that raiders had taken the town and were robbing the office of the Death Gulch mine, and from all sides the citizens ran out into the street, some of them unarmed, and others with whatever weapons they could lay hands on in their hurry.

But the ten men whom the raiders had left outside of the office were well armed, and were posted so as to command the approaches to their position. The appearance of any person within range of them was the signal for rifle shots which caused all but the boldest to beat a hasty retreat.

It became evident that the town was captured, and that the raid was on too large a

scale to be defeated by a small and unorganized force.

Before leaders could come forward and rally the citizens to meet the emergency, the raiders had finished their work, and were ready to decamp.

The men who were in the bank came out, and all mounted their horses. After firing a parting volley to scatter the citizens who were gathering in their rear, they dashed away up the lane, where there were none to dispute their passage.

The stranger who had waited at the office door mysteriously disappeared.

John Warne reached the station near the Small Hopes mine, only to learn that the message he had received was a hoax or something worse.

He thought that he might as well go on and visit Captain Durkee, and was about starting for the mine, when he received a dispatch from Death Gulch, which caused him to take the first train back.

At a late hour of the night succeeding the raid, Pedro Rosalba and his wife and Manuel were seated in a room at the ranch, with the doors locked, and with sentries stationed all around the house.

They were sorting and examining stacks and packages of papers, which they took from coarse bags. Most of these papers they threw into the fire. A few were laid aside for preservation.

"This has been a great strike," said Rosalba, "and I doubt if we could have hit those infernal Yankees a harder blow. I fancy that the loss of this pile of papers, to say nothing of the money the boys got, will cripple them about as badly as their New Ophir swindle crippled me."

"They will be as mad as hornets," said Manuel. "It is to be hoped that none of our men will go back on us."

"Oh, they are too well paid to want to split."

So the work of inspection and destruction went on. Deeds, leases, contracts, notes, accounts, all sorts of valuable papers and documents, were ruthlessly sacrificed, while the destroyers laughed and chuckled over their vile work.

At last Pedro Rosalba got hold of a document that caused him special delight.

"Here it is!" he exclaimed. "Here is the very deed that the San Francisco man told us about, from Henry Warren to Buck Farley. It is just such as he described. Look, *Lucretia*! does that seem to be the signature of your dead husband?"

"I don't know," replied Senora Rosalba. "It is so long since I have seen his signature that I have forgotten what it was like. But this is of course a fraud."

"Whatever it is, I have got hold of it now, and am that much ahead of the game. Shall I burn it? No, I will keep it, and the time may come when I shall be able to expose the swindle and punish the swindlers."

CHAPTER XXII.

STRIKING AT THE HEAD.

BUCK FARLEY, the Bonanza Prince, at Bluffton on business for Farley & Warne, received by a messenger from the nearest telegraph station a dispatch from the managing clerk of the firm, giving him the news of the alleged disaster at the Small Hopes mine.

"That is bad," said he; "but I don't worry about the mine, as I had never expected much from it. Poor Durkee! it is a pity that his ambitious hopes should have such an ending. Warne has gone to see him, and of course will do everything that can be done for him. But I must finish my business here, and get home as soon as possible."

Before he was ready to start there came another dispatch, not from the managing clerk, and with grief and chagrin he read these lines:

"Fifteen masked men entered town and captured the office this morning. Sacked completely. Money and papers all taken. Runnels shot dead. Raiders all rode away unharmed. Warne gone to Small Hopes."

No request to return was added, as that would have been unnecessary. The news was enough to cause Buck Farley to hasten to Death Gulch as rapidly as possible.

He at once inquired about the stage. It was expected shortly. When it arrived he took his seat in it, with two other passengers.

Along the Bluffton stage road a solitary traveler was riding at a moderate gait, though he was mounted on a fine horse.

He was quite a young man, and his pale face had a drawn and pinched expression, though it was not at all unpleasant to look at. His neck was short, and on his back was a perceptible hump. He was dressed neatly, carried saddlebags, and there were pistols in his belt.

As he was riding along slowly, with his head drooped, and his mind in a reverie, he was startled by the sound of the trampling of horses.

Looking up, he saw the road blocked by three horsemen.

As it was dusk, and he was short sighted, he did not at first perceive that they were masked;

but he did see the shining barrels of the revolvers they leveled at him.

He started to draw a pistol, but was at once made aware of the uselessness of resistance.

"None of that, youngster!" said a rough and stern voice. "We've got the drop on you, dead, and the best thing you can do is to give in and take things easy."

At the same time some more men rode up and surrounded him, and he knew that he was a prisoner.

He was at once disarmed; but there seemed to be no disposition to harm him.

"I suppose you want my money," he said, addressing the man who seemed to be the leader of the band. "I will give you all I have, and then I hope you will let me go on."

"You are mistaken, young pilgrim," was the unexpected reply. "We don't want your money, and we don't propose to let you go on. You were on the road toward Bluffton. Was that the point you were striking for?"

"Yes."

"Well, my son, it will soon be too late for boys of your age to be traveling alone, and we have reasons for not wanting you to go to Bluffton just now. So you will please come to our camp, and see the boss of this nice little party, and make yourself comfortable for a while."

There was no refusing this polite invitation, and the youth accompanied his captors through the timber until they came to a small camp-fire, around which a few men were seated.

As he drew near enough to see their faces, he started, as if he recognized them, and a deep shade of displeasure came over his pale features.

Two of the men were Pedro Rosalba and Manuel Vincente.

"Here is a young pilgrim," said the leader of the horsemen, "who was going toward Bluffton. We obeyed orders, and took him in."

"Uncle, it is Benito!" exclaimed Manuel, jumping up.

"You are right," said Rosalba, with an oath. "Set him down here, Bob, and let us take a look at him. This is a first-class find that you have made. If such good luck holds through the night, we will soon be solid."

Benito Rosalba dismounted of his own accord, and walked up to the camp-fire.

"I would like to know what right you have to stop me on the road," he said.

"What right?" replied the Mexican. "Why, you young scallawag, you are my son, though I don't pretend to be proud of you. A father has a right to catch and keep his runaway son wherever he finds him."

"I was going my own way on my own business, and was not interfering with you," said Benito. "You can gain nothing by catching me, even if you could keep me."

"Perhaps I am the best judge of that. Manuel, what ought to be done with this disobedient young rascal?"

"He deserves hanging," replied Manuel; "but I suppose a sound thrashing will have to serve him."

"I will take him home, and then we will consider the matter and decide his case."

"Perhaps you had better not do that, uncle—not just now, at least."

"We will wait until we see how this business ends. If we succeed, I shall know better how to deal with him. Now, Benito, whose name should be Maldito, can you tell me how your fine and wealthy patron, your Bonanza Prince, is getting on?"

"That is none of your business," coldly replied the youth.

"Indeed it is my business, very much of my business. I have made it my business, I can tell you, since he cheated me out of so many thousands with his accursed Ophir swindle. Well, Maldito, I can tell you something about him that may be news to you, and not very pleasant news, either. His office at Death Gulch, in that stout stone building, has been captured."

"Captured?" exclaimed Benito, gazing intently at the speaker.

"Captured by a few bold men, who rode into town and took possession of it, without asking leave. I hear that one of the clerks, who tried to show fight, was shot dead. He should have had better sense, poor fellow! The safe was robbed, and everything of value that the place contained was taken away. Don't you suppose that such a blow will be likely to worry your Bonanza Prince a little?"

"Who were the robbers?" asked Benito. "As you know so much about it, you can tell me that. I believe that you had a hand in the outrageous crime, yourself. If you did not commit it, you planned it."

"I don't care what you believe. The men who could do such a deed are not the sort who are likely to be caught."

"Where was Mr. Farley when his office was robbed?"

"Far away at Bluffton."

"Where was Mr. Warne?"

"Whistled off to Small Hopes. But they will get their dues, personally and particularly. The turn of Farley, that infernal swindler, will soon come. We are waiting for him now. He is coming from Bluffton by the stage. I mean

to catch him, and show him that there is more than one way to play a brace game."

"How do you know that he is coming from Bluffton by the stage?" eagerly asked Benito.

"I know that a dispatch was taken to Bluffton to him, telling him of the doings at Death Gulch, and that will be sure to fetch him by the first chance. Oh, we have a sure thing, and we don't mean to let anybody spoil our chances. That is why you were picked up, and here you must stay until the game is played. Come, now, you may have some supper with us, unless you consider yourself too good for our company."

Benito said that he had no desire to eat.

"Sit down, then, you young porcupine, and mourn for your Bonanza Prince, who will not be able to be a patron of yours much longer."

Pedro Rosalba and his companions squatted near the camp-fire, and began to eat the supper which they had been cooking. Benito seated himself at the foot of a tree near them.

"By the way, Maldito," remarked Rosalba, "have you seen or heard anything yet of that precious step-sister of yours?"

"No," curtly replied the youth.

"So I supposed. You need not trouble yourself about her. Manuel and I know where she is, and we will soon have her in our hands. You can go to sleep and dream of her if you want to. There is plenty of time. We do not expect the stage to come along much before midnight."

Although Benito was seated away from the group, he was but a few steps from them. They were all armed, and his weapons had been taken from him. Besides, he was a lunch-back, weakly, and with a poor pair of legs, while they were strong and swift men. They had him under their eyes, and were sure that he could not escape, if he should be audacious enough to make the attempt.

Benito thought differently. The liberty of Buck Farley, if not his life, was at stake, and he considered his own life of little value, compared with that of his benefactor.

Looking about, he saw that his horse, which had been insecurely fastened to a bush, was loose, and was standing still, with his bridle hanging down. The other horses were tethered.

Watching his chance, he sprang suddenly to his feet, and ran toward the loose horse, which whinnied as it saw him coming.

His unable legs did him good service. Never before had they been put to such speed. Before his captors could guess his purpose, he reached the horse, and sprang into the saddle.

Two pistol-shots were fired at him in rapid succession, one of them by Manuel Vincente.

"Hold!" cried Rosalba. "He is a scamp, but he is my son. Don't shoot! Mount, and follow him!"

But a few seconds were lost in untethering and mounting the horses, and Benito was galloping away.

"He will get off, and will warn the stage," said Manuel.

"Curse him!" exclaimed Rosalba. "Shoot him, then! Shoot him down, boys!"

Rifles and pistols were aimed at the youth, and the reports rung out rapidly; but it is hard to hit a flying mark when darkness has set in.

Benito, crouching to his saddle-bow, dashed away through the timber, and his furious captors followed in pursuit.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A RUNNING FIGHT.

THE horse Benito rode had plenty of speed and wind, and he was desperate. His own peril did not concern him, as his one thought was that he must stop the stage and turn it back, before Rosalba and his men could overtake him.

He knew the direction of the road, and his horse knew it, too. He soon reached it, turned toward Bluffton, and away he went at a break-neck gallop.

His purpose was quite too plain to his pursuers when they struck the road, and a volley of rifle-shots was fired after him; but he was then far enough away to afford to laugh at them, and still be sped on.

"After him!" shouted Pedro Rosalba. "Shoot him down, if you can get near enough! Anyhow, we must hurry on and strike the stage."

The question was then one of speed and endurance. It was evident that Benito's horse was faster than any of the others, and that his pursuers could not hope to overtake him unless some accident should befall him; but if he should turn back the stage, they might reach it and attack it long before it could get to Bluffton, and thus accomplish the purpose which had been so seriously upset by his escape.

This was not so easy or so safe a plan as that of lying in wait; but it was the only one left to them, and they were forced to go on, as information of their purpose was preceding them.

As the horses of the pursuers differed in quality, they straggled along in an irregular line, but all at the top of their speed. Manuel Vincente in the lead, with his pistol in his hand, ready to fire at Benito if he should come within shooting distance.

Although not a good figure on the ground, and a poor runner, Benito was at home on horseback. He knew that he could trust his horse, and he hoped to get such a lead as would enable him to reach the stage and turn it back in time to prevent it from being overtaken by Rosalba's party. As it was not expected at his starting point until midnight, there seemed to be good ground for this hope.

But the Bonanza Prince was in a hurry to get back to Death Gulch, and he had promised the driver good pay for fast time.

Consequently the stage was several miles further from Bluffton than it usually was at that hour of the night.

As Benito was thundering along the road at a headlong gallop, increasing his distance from his pursuers, he thought that he heard the rumbling of approaching wheels.

He spurred his horse, and pushed forward until he reached the top of a hill, from which point he could plainly see the lights of the stage as it toiled up the long slope.

Glancing backward, he saw nothing of Rosalba's party, though he could faintly hear the rapid footfalls of their horses in the distance.

Again striking spurs into his horse, he dashed down the hill at full speed, waving his arms as he neared the stage, and calling to the driver to stop.

The driver halted just before Benito reached the stage. He was not to be frightened by one man; but it was well to stop and see what was the matter.

"Is Mr. Farley in the stage?" asked Benito, almost breathlessly, as he pulled up his panting and perspiring horse.

"Yes. What's up?"

"Turn back at once, then, and drive to Bluffton as fast as you can!"

Buck Farley and the two other passengers thrust their heads out of the stage.

"Is that you, Benito?" asked the Bonanza Prince, recognizing the voice of the excited youth. "What's the matter?"

"You must turn back, sir. Pedro Rosalba and a dozen men have plotted to waylay the stage and capture you. They stopped me, but I escaped from them, and they are pursuing me, close on my heels."

"All right," said Farley. "Turn back, driver! We will have to run for it. Hurry on to Bluffton, Benito! Why, lad, are you hurt?"

He saw blood on Benito's hand and clothes.

"Nothing to worry me, sir. Just a graze."

"Ride on to Bluffton, then, and make the best time you can. Tell the people to turn out and meet us."

By this time the stage had been turned around and it went clattering down the hill, Benito spurring his horse in advance.

Before it reached the bottom of the hill, the pursuers were at the top, where they halted for a moment.

They plainly saw the stage as it was pushing toward Bluffton, and caught sight of Benito as he spurred away in the distance.

The scene added to their fury and increased the eagerness of their pursuit.

"This is better than I had hoped for," said Pedro Rosalba. "It is many miles to Bluffton, Mr. Buck Farley! Push on, boys! and we will soon catch that cursed stage."

The chances were largely in their favor. The stage had a light load and four horses; but the driver had been making fast time, and the speed with which they had traveled had told upon his horses.

Rosalba's men had also been making fast time, and their horses were more or less worried; but they were not in harness, and had no load to drag.

One party was animated by the desire to escape, and the other by eagerness to capture, and so the flight and pursuit went on.

Buck Farley's stage companions were two young and active men. One was Sam Jennings, a sporting man well known in that region, and the other introduced himself as Mr. Ross, a speculator from Denver. Both were well armed and expressed their willingness to make the best fight they could for their pockets and their persons. The driver carried a breech-loading rifle under his seat, and Farley had two long-range revolvers, on which he prided himself.

"It will come to a fight, gentlemen, unless we surrender," said the Bonanza Prince. "We are sure to be overtaken before we can get back to Bluffton. I have reason to believe that those scoundrels are after me, and I doubt if they would molest either of you. I don't want you to put yourselves in danger for my sake."

"Don't you mean to fight?" asked Jennings.

"Of course I will. There is nothing else for me to do."

"Then I will stand by you, for one."

"And I, for another," said Ross.

"Well, gentlemen, we had better prepare to give them the best we have in the shop, and in the first place we must make an opening in the back part of this hearse, so that we can get a fair sight at them."

A hole was cut in the back of the stage, and the passengers, looking rearward, could plainly see their pursuers speeding after them, except when an abrupt turn of the road cut off the view.

A stern chase is a long chase at sea, but it is not necessarily so on land. It depends upon the speed and endurance of the chaser and the chased. In this case the chased had the worst of it, and were gradually but surely overhauled by their pursuers, until the latter were near enough to open fire with their rifles.

To this fire the passengers replied in a similar manner; but the jolting and rocking of the stage prevented their aim from being anything like accurate, and their shots were wild. But the shots of the men on horseback were almost equally uncertain.

So the chase continued; but the pursuers were gradually lessening their distance from the stage, and an occasional bullet struck the vehicle.

The driver, crouching forward on his seat, lashed the horses, and encouraged them with his voice, and they flew over the rocky road at the top of their speed, like a runaway team, the stage rattling and rocking after them, swaying from side to side, and now and then running dangerously on two wheels as it whirled around a bend. More than once it might have upset, if the passengers, appreciating their peril, had not thrown their weight upon the uppermost side, like "live ballast to windward."

This could not last forever. Skillful driving was needed, in daylight and at a moderate speed, to pilot the stage over that rough road, and in the darkness, at a breakneck gait, the peril was greatly increased. There was danger at every moment that the vehicle would sink into a rut, or strike a bowlder, that would upset or break it, or that the overpressed horses would drop in their harness.

The latter contingency was what occurred.

"Can't hold out much longer, Mr. Farley!" shouted the driver. "The horses is clean blowed, and the nigh wheeler's c'ena'most ready to drop."

This announcement was what the Bonanza Prince had been expecting, and he was ready for it.

"Can you reach Frenchman's Gap?" he asked.

"I reckon we kin fetch that, sir."

"Better go a little easier then, and make a sure thing of it. Haul up when you come to the narrowest part of the canyon."

The driver ceased to lash his horses, and the passengers doubled the shots from their "stern chasers," while the horsemen reserved their fire, yelling as they saw how rapidly they were gaining upon their quarry.

A shot from the stage struck one of the foremost riders, and this delayed the pursuit for a few precious minutes.

"Half a mile further!" exclaimed Farley, who knew the route well.

"Will we be safe then?" asked Mr. Ross.

"No; but we will have a chance to make a square fight."

Half a mile further the wearied horses hauled the jolting stage, and the high walls of Frenchman's Gap closed in upon them, while their antagonists, who had slightly breathed their horses, pressed forward with fresh speed.

Just at the narrowest part of the canyon, the point which Farley had desired to reach, the nigh wheeler dropped, and the stage came to a sudden stop.

The driver jumped down from his seat, and cut the traces, sure that the tired animals would not go far.

In a few minutes the stage, nearly wrecked, was drawn across the road to serve as a barricade, and the driver and his passengers bestirred themselves in adding to the advantages of their position.

They had accomplished but little in this direction, when their foes came galloping into the canyon.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A BLOW THAT MISSED.

"THIS seems to be a game of three to one, or thereabout," said Buck Farley, as he looked down the Gap. "It is a very pretty chance for a scrimmage, as it stands."

It was fortunate for the stage people that the horses had held out as long as they did. They were still at a considerable distance from Bluffton, but had reached a position that gave them a fair chance to make a good fight. The stage was a passable barricade, and they improved every moment that was spared to them in piling stones in front of them and digging a trench across the road. Their enemies were obliged to advance right in front of them, as the steep sides of the canyon left no chance for a flank movement.

Business began at once, but a little more cautiously than Farley and his companions might have expected.

Rosalba's men dismounted, and moved forward slowly under the darkness, as if careful of their precious skins. Then one of them raised his voice from behind a bowlder, and hailed:

"Hello, you folks!"

"Hello, horse-thief!" replied the clear tenor of Sam Jennings.

"You had better be a bit polite, whoever you

are. We want to give you a chance. The man we're arter is Buck Farley, and he knows it. Give him up, you other folks, and you may slide off without bein' touched."

"You may slide off on your ear," replied Jennings. "If you want anybody here, come right along and take him!"

There was a rush in answer to this bold challenge, followed by a volley of bullets that struck the stage and rattled among the rocks. Mose Akers, the driver, had joined the other combatants, and Buck Farley, with his two splendid revolvers, good for a hundred yards, was quite equal to three men. Sam Jennings was a good shot and a cool hand, and Mose Akers declared that the Denver speculator was "no slouch."

The fire from the stage was so hot and heavy that the rush was soon stopped, and the raiders fell back. They had succeeded in locating the position they were to attack, and some of their shots had struck uncomfortably near the men for whom they were intended, as was proved by more than one graze.

There was a brief lull in the engagement, and Farley and his friends used every minute of rest in improving their defenses.

Then the man who had hailed them before lifted up his voice again, and repeated the offer he had made:

"We've got the dead wood on you folks," he said, "and can afford to be lib'ral. If you try to hold out ag'inst us, it's sure death."

"Go and put your head in a bag," contemptuously replied Jennings. "We hold four aces, and can sweep the board."

The Bonanza Prince spoke, and his voice sounded far down the gap.

"Tell Pedro Rosalba from me that he is running his head into a noose a little too fast. He ought not to hurry up the business. His time will come soon enough."

Two shots in rapid succession showed that this little speech had touched Rosalba and Manuel "on the raw."

Their men, not so hasty, began to try a different style of tactics, advancing along the sides of the canyon, taking cover wherever they could find it, and firing occasionally and carefully.

"They are trying to creep up on us, so that they can make a sure thing of the next rush," said Farley. "We must fire at every flash, and keep our tools full of cartridges."

The four men at the stage worked hard, firing rapidly and constantly; but they did not seriously impede the slow but sure progress of those who were creeping up to them.

After a while Rosalba's men ceased firing altogether, and there were no longer any flashes to betray their whereabouts, or to show how far they had advanced.

The sky had clouded up, and the darkness in the canyon had become deeper.

But the assailants had lost much precious time, and it was barely possible that aid might come from Bluffton, unless they should strike quick and hard.

"It is going to be close work now," said Farley, after he had looked in vain for something to aim at. "See that your pistols are well charged, and have them handy."

The words were scarcely out of his lips when there came a terrible blinding and deafening volley, from both sides of the gap, poured right into the wrecked stage.

The effect was deadly. Sam Jennings was shot through the head, and the stage-driver was badly wounded.

Desperately the Denver speculator seized Jennings's revolver, and stood up with Buck Farley to meet their foes, who howled as they rushed forward.

"It is all up with us now," said Ross.

"Perhaps not," replied Farley. "I think I hear a noise up the gap."

At that moment nothing could be heard but the rapid exchange of pistol-shots, as the two remaining passengers breasted the rush, and man after man went down before their fire.

But Ross was shot through the arm, and the furious raiders were closing in on the one man who was left, when there was a rush of clattering hoofs, and the men from Bluffton came galloping down the gap.

The surviving assailants turned and fled to their horses, which they reached and mounted before the new arrivals could force their way through or over the barricade.

Pursuit was made; but there was no chance for the tired horses of the Bluffton men to overtake the fugitives.

Buck Farley then learned that Benito's horse had dropped dead in front of the Bluffton hotel, where a public meeting was in progress, and that he had just been able to deliver his message before he fainted. The best men on the best horses started immediately, and made the fastest possible time to the scene of conflict.

The Bonanza Prince rode back to Bluffton, whither the body of Sam Jennings and his two wounded companions were carried.

When he passed over that route again he was accompanied by Benito, and attended by a sufficient escort to prevent the possibility of a successful attack.

On reaching Death Gulch they went at once

to the office, where they found John Warne busily employed in trying to bring order out of the confusion to which the raid had reduced the affairs of the firm.

That night the two partners and Benito had a consultation in one of the handsomely-furnished up-stairs rooms of the stone building.

"So the Small Hopes dispatch was nothing but a hoax," remarked Farley.

"Something more than that," replied Warne. "It was a scheme to draw me away from Death Gulch."

"The scoundrels played a sharp game; but they will have to pay dearly for their fun. We need not worry about the funds they took, though the loss of some of the documents may seriously embarrass us. However we will straighten up matters as well as we can. Have you formed an opinion concerning the parties who were responsible for that robbery?"

"I can guess how they were," replied the old gentleman.

"Of course you can. He who was behind the business must have been a man who had a personal grudge against us, as mere robbers would have contented themselves with such plunder as they could use, without carrying off our papers. He was the same man who led the attack upon me on the Bluffton road, and that man was Pedro Rosalba."

Benito winced.

"That man, for reasons that he can best understand," continued Farley, "has declared war against me, and war it is. I am sure to win, when I choose to play my cards, and justice must and shall be done. By the way, Benito, how did you succeed in your search for your sister?"

John Warne looked up eagerly as this question was asked.

"I have not found her," sadly replied the youth. "No sign, no trace. I obeyed your instructions, and have not spared your money. I scattered it freely, but with no result. I have put some sharp and active men on the trail; but the difficulty has been that there was no trail—no clew. She seems to have disappeared as completely as poor Dorlon did."

Buck Farley shuddered, and his partner turned pale.

"I hope you have not given up the search," said the former.

"Indeed I have not, sir. I thought that I ought to come back here and report. I have still one man out, and expect him to meet me here. His name is Wesley Ryder, and I consider him a remarkably good man for the work."

"As I told you, Benito," said Farley, "there are some things that even money cannot do. No amount of money would have moved that stage another foot into Frenchman's Gap, and all the money in the world would not have saved me from Pedro Rosalba's clutches, if you had not made such fast time to Bluffton. But your sister shall be found. I mean to attend to the search myself, as soon as I can straighten up matters here. I must first settle with Pedro Rosalba, before he hires some scoundrel to shoot me down. I am sorry that he is your father, Benito."

"He has been a strange sort of a father to me," replied the young man. "He has as much as disowned me, and he was willing to kill me the other night."

"He is a bad and dangerous man, my young friend, and he surely deserves killing."

CHAPTER XXV.

A GOSPEL SHARP.

A STRANGER rode up to the Right Bower, a mixture of tavern and saloon, but mostly saloon, on the edge of the new town of Warne-ton.

He was a tall man of thirty-five or forty, neat in his personal appearance, well-mounted and with a pair of black saddle-bags slung over his saddle. The most marked peculiarity of his personal appearance was his suit of black, the coat being decidedly of a clerical cut, single-breasted, and with a narrow, straight collar. A white necktie and a clean-shaven face, surmounted by a black hat, completed his clerical appearance, and gave him the look of an Episcopal pastor on his travels.

The bar-room of the Right Bower contained at that time several of the roughest characters that infested Warne-ton or Death Gulch, and they opened their eyes in amazement as this clerical stranger, having hitched his horse, stepped in at the door with his saddle-bags on his arm.

"A gospel sharp, by thunder!" exclaimed Smallpox Sam, the bully of the Right Bower.

"I have called," said the stranger, "to inquire the way to a town, or settlement, or camp, that bears the forbidding appellation of Death Gulch."

"What does he mean?" asked the barkeeper.

"Wal, stranger," said Smallpox Sam, swaggering up to the new-comer, "as you've called, you've got to show yer hand. What do you hold, anyhow?"

"My friend," mildly replied the stranger, "I do not understand the nature of your question, and I am sorry to say that your manner is

not distinguished by the highest degree of politeness."

"Oh, bother yer big words! This is the Right Bower, and we're all trumps. Got anythin' to back the hand?"

"Really, my friend, I must confess that your questioning is quite incomprehensible to me."

"Quit slingin' them jaw-breakers and talk straight. What's yer handle? Who are you, anyhow?"

"My name is Wesley Ryder."

"And you're a gospel sharp, fur sartin. It's mighty seldom we see a spekulator of your stripe in these diggin's, 'specially a-slidin' into the Right Bower, and we want to treat you right. Have a drink?"

"Pardon me," replied the stranger, "I am not accustomed to drinking spirituous liquors, and I prefer to decline your kind invitation."

"It don't make a dit o' bifference what you prefer. We all take whisky straight. What's yourn?"

"In the interest of peace and harmony I will follow the example that is set before me, and take some of the same."

"Set 'em up, Eph."

The rounders filled their glasses, and Wesley Ryder poured out a fair allowance of whisky, which he qualified slightly with water, and swallowed it without a wry face.

"That's all right," said Smallpox Sam.

"Now, stranger, it's your turn to treat."

"Excuse me. I am in the habit of teaching that the practice is a sinful one, and I must conform my practice to my precepts. If you will kindly direct me to Death Gulch, I will go forward."

"Not till you give us a sermon. We hain't struck a gospel sharp fur ever so long, and we're keen fur a dose o' doctrine. Shoot off yer jaw, and mind you hit center."

The stranger was visibly annoyed. He laid his saddle-bags on the counter, and looked Smallpox Sam straight in the face.

"If you mean what you say," said he, "you are excessively impertinent."

"Be keerful how you talk," remarked the bully. "I've knowed men to be hornswoggled fur less'n that. You've got to give us a sermon, or a prayer, or suthin'."

"I would preach your funeral sermon with the greatest pleasure," coolly replied Ryder, "and I don't know but I might be inclined to furnish the corpse."

The burst of laughter which this retort aroused made Smallpox Sam furious. He felt as a boy may feel when a kitten that he has been torturing turns and claws him.

"Look-a here, stranger," he snarled, as he shook his big fist in Ryder's face. "That thar's fightin' talk. You needn't putend ign'ance 'cause you know that's wot it is. Jest git right down on yer knees, and beg my pardon, or I'll wipe up the floor with yer."

Ryder eyed his rough antagonist with a look of great disgust.

"You are a very unpleasant person," said he. "Please remove that paw from the vicinity of my nose. It doesn't smell a bit like peaches."

Smallpox Sam drew back the "paw" quickly, with the evident intention of aiming a blow; but his purpose was anticipated by the clerical gentleman, who launched out his right hand so swiftly and forcibly that the bully of the Right Bower measured his length on the floor.

The stranger seemed to be transformed. With his right hand under his coat, his left foot thrust forward, and keen eyes gleaming, he looked around to see if any person felt disposed to take up the quarrel on behalf of the fallen bravo.

No one stirred. The bully's domineering ways had made him obnoxious to the frequenters of the Right Bower, and they were glad to see him discomfited. Besides, the impression began to prevail among them that the stranger was "a bad customer to tackle."

It was a minute or so before Smallpox Sam recovered his senses. Then he sat up and looked about as if he was dazed.

Seeing his antagonist, he drew a pistol; but again Ryder was too quick for him, and he was instantly covered by a cocked revolver.

"Drop that lethal weapon, my unchristian friend, or I shall be compelled to do you a damage."

The bully did drop it.

"I give in, stranger," he said. "If thar's any gospel sharp that lays over you, I don't want to see him. Durned if I didn't think lightning had struck me. And it seems like I hain't got no friends in this crowd, neither."

"Now that peace and harmony are re-established," said Ryder, "I must overcome my conscientious scruples sufficiently to invite the present party to partake of some liquid poison."

All partook, and a feeling of admiration for the clerical stranger rapidly developed. At the same time it was evident that the credit of the crowd required that they should get even with him in some way, and Ben Smiley, who was the recognized card sharp of the Right Bower, pressed him to join in "a little game of draw."

"What is that, my friend?" he innocently asked.

"Only a quiet and gentlemanly kind of a game, and nice as a Sunday school. If you

don't know it, we can teach it to you as easy as winkin'."

"I trust it is an innocent recreation. If so, in the interest of peace and harmony I will comply with your request."

All sat down to the game. It was to be supposed that the stranger had money, and why should not a portion of it pass into their pockets?

Ryder displayed a childlike ignorance of the game; but he learned rapidly under the able tuition of his companions, and began to develop a real interest after he had lost a few stakes.

"You must bet bigger if you want to win anythin'," said Smiley. "Nothin' venture, nothin' have, is the rule of draw poker."

The stranger increased his bets, and soon there was a pretty heavy jack pot on the table, and it was Ryder's deal.

When the cards were dealt, Smiley opened the jack pot, one other "came in," and Ryder completed the group that were to contest the pot.

Smiley called for one card, and his comrade for two, and Ryder betrayed a weak hand by taking three.

Smiley led off with a bet of five dollars, which the second man raised to ten, and Ryder to fifteen.

In the next round thirty dollars were added to the pot, and then Smiley, believing that the time had come to spring the trap, planked down a lump of fifty dollars.

The second man dropped out.

The clerical stranger seemed to be puzzled and confused, and studied his cards closely, keeping them out of the sight of those who were eager to get a peep at them.

At last his solemn countenance showed that he had arrived at a decision.

"For the sake of the missionary society attached to my pastorate," said he, "I will see you fifty dollars—I trust, my friend, that I am using the proper expressions—and go you fifty dollars better."

This was an astonisher for Ben Smiley, who began to fear that he had undertaken to shear a wolf. But it would never do to "weaken," and he proceeded to cover the last named sum by borrowing from his friends, and "called."

The stranger showed the traditional four aces, to which the card sharp of the Right Bower could only oppose the usual four kings.

An expression of intense disgust pervaded the features of the party, as it was evident that they had been sold out at a cheap rate and on easy terms.

Ryder again invited them to poison themselves at his expense, and they absorbed their whisky sadly.

"Yere's another chicken as feels like roostin' low," said Smiley. "Arter this a gospel sharp will be the last man I shall want to strike."

"Durned if I don't believe he's the chap that runs the church of the Holy Poker," remarked the barkeeper.

"Now, my hospitable friends," said Ryder, "as this appears to be an eligible location for collecting funds for my missionary society, I shall not hasten my departure. If the landlord will kindly see that my horse is attended to, I will take a short walk, for the sake of exercise and meditation."

The clerical stranger walked away, leaving a poorer and wiser crowd behind him.

It was a lonely road that he took—one which led to an abandoned mine—and he had not gone more than a mile from the Right Bower, when he met three men on horseback.

"This is the biggest kind of luck—here's a preacher," said one of the three, when they were within hearing distance.

They dismounted when they reached Ryder, probably out of respect for his clerical appearance, and the man who had spoken raised his hat.

He was a well-dressed young man; but his low brows, dark features, and forbidding cast of countenance were not at all attractive.

"I am very glad to have met you, sir," said he. "I am looking for a clergyman to perform a marriage ceremony. The place is but a short distance from here, and you will be well paid for your trouble."

"I must ask you to excuse me," politely replied Ryder, who was a little disconcerted by this application. "I am traveling for pleasure, and I never perform any official duties outside of my own parish."

"But this is a matter of necessity, sir, and I am in a hurry. I really cannot excuse you."

"Then I shall be obliged to excuse myself, as I prefer not to comply with your request."

"I should be very sorry to use force with a clergyman; but I shall be compelled to do so, unless you will be more accommodating, and go with us willingly."

The speaker showed a revolver, and his two companions imitated his example.

Wesley Ryder appreciated the force of these arguments, and the matter did not seem to be of sufficient importance to require him to combat them. Besides, the urgency of this application argued that there must be something strange and unusual behind it, and his disposition and proclivities prompted him to nod

out what it was. It was more than possible that he might strike something of interest in the line of his profession.

"Will you kindly favor me with your name?" he asked.

"My name is Manuel Vincente," replied the man who had conducted the negotiation.

Wesley Ryder had reasons of his own for wishing to know all he could learn about Manuel Vincente, and here was that individual thrown at his head, as it were.

"There will be no occasion to use any force," he said. "I did not suppose the affair was so urgent."

CHAPTER XXVI.

STRIKING AT THE HEART.

JACOB HORNBY was dead and buried; but he was not forgotten. Rosina cherished his memory as that of a dear and faithful friend. He had not only proved his friendship by dying in the defense of their joint property; but his will had made her the heiress of the greater part of his possessions, which were a fair little fortune in themselves.

Mrs. Outram mourned his loss sincerely. She had hoped that in time "her Rose" would consent to marry that friendly and well-balanced man of business.

The Little Ruby mine, under the superintendence of Parmenas Pratt, with the supervision of Rosina, began to "pan out" satisfactorily, and its promise was excellent.

Rosina, whose active temperament would not allow her to remain cooped up in the Lincoln House, frequently rode out to the mine with Pratt, to inspect the ore as it was brought out, and to watch the work.

One evening, when they were returning from the mine together, rejoicing over the growing richness of its product, Rosina became more thoughtful as they approached a little clump of trees, near the mouth of a narrow glen that opened out from the hills.

"I have often thought," she said, "what a capital place that would be for an ambush for a party of highwaymen, if they cared to capture us."

"I have thought of that, too," replied Pratt; "but we have often passed that place, and no person has shown a disposition to molest us."

"The pitcher that goes often to the well, Mr. Pratt—"

Was broken before she could finish the sentence.

Five men sprung out from a clump of trees—a heavy force to be arrayed against one man and a woman—and surrounded and seized them before they could resist.

These five men were well armed, and all were masked, and the operation was conducted in a style which showed that they were accustomed to the business.

"What does this mean?" demanded Rosina.

"What do you want?"

"We want you, my lady," replied one who evidently tried to disguise his voice as well as his face. "As there are two of you, we must take both."

"That is nonsense," said Rosina, speaking more calmly than she felt. "We will give you our money and all the valuables we have about us, and you will let us go on."

"Not much, miss. You are mistaken in the men. That is not what we are after. We have some particular business with you, and all you've got to do is to go right along with us."

Parmenas Pratt, whose hands had been tied behind his back, looked piteously at Rosina, whose face was impenetrable behind her veil. Whatever she felt, she was not the sort of young woman who would "weaken," except at the last extremity.

"Lead on, then," said she. "When you have run your necks into a noose you need not say that I did not warn you."

They did lead on, the horse of each of the captives being led by one of the masked men, and the others walking at the flanks and rear, as if to prevent the possibility of escape.

They went up the glen to the top of the divide, and then down between two spurs of hills to an old road, up which they turned, and soon reached the mouth of an abandoned mine.

"Why, this is the New Ophir," said Pratt, wishing to convey that information to Rosina, though it might not be of any value.

"Hold your jaw!" exclaimed the man at his side.

The young lady naturally thought of her experience with that speculation, and of how she had been saved from disaster by the liberality of Buck Farley. She also naturally thought of Pedro Rosalba, who had lost so heavily, and who then claimed to be the owner of the mine. With these thoughts the disguised voice of the leader of her captors was connected, and it was natural that she should fear that she was being led into a serious difficulty.

The two prisoners were dismounted and taken in at the mouth of the mine, which slanted downward, following the lead that had outcropped in the side of the hill.

One of the men took a lantern from a hole in the rock, turned up the light, and led the way

down the damp and slippery incline, until they reached a subterranean chamber of considerable size, from which the former managers of the mine had tunneled in different directions, with the hope of striking a new lead in place of the exhausted one, or with the intention of deceiving investors.

Here a bright fire was burning, and three men were seated near it.

One of them arose as the party came in.

"Have you got her?" he excitedly exclaimed.

"Are you sure you are right?"

"I have no doubt of that, uncle," replied the leader of the party. "But you shall see for yourself."

His voice, which was no longer disguised, was that of Manuel Vincente, and the other voice was Pedro Rosalba's.

Rosina shuddered as she heard them.

"Now, young lady," said Manuel, "we will put an end to your mystery by raising this veil."

She put out her hand to prevent him; but he was too quick for her, and her indignant face and flashing eyes were fully exposed in the light of the fire.

"So it is really you, Rose Warren," said Pedro Rosalba. "You have been a long time away, and I am glad that you have returned at last."

"I would never willingly have come within sight or hearing of you," she indignantly replied, "and you will yet suffer for your brutality in bringing me to this place. You have no right or authority over me, and I advise you, if you value your own safety, to let me go."

"I have heard pullets try to crow before now, young woman, and I have always laughed at them. If I remember rightly, you are not yet fully of age. Consequently your mother is your natural guardian, and I am her representative. I hope you understand that."

"I understand that you have some evil scheme of your own to serve by getting me into your power, but I warn you that it will not succeed. If it depends in any particular upon my will, I shall refuse and defy you."

"We will see about that. You may as well calm yourself down."

"But I hope, sir, that you have nothing to gain by keeping this gentleman a prisoner, and that he may go free."

"Do you take us to be such fools as to let him run out and spread the news? Not until we have settled your case, anyhow. Besides, I have good cause to remember him, and am pretty strongly inclined to give him good cause to remember me."

It was plain that the chances of escape for the two prisoners might be represented by a very small figure, and that there was nothing for them to do but settle down to a patient endurance of their fate; but Rose Warren was anxious to know the worst, to be informed of the extent of her step-father's intentions.

"I hope, Senor Rosalba," said she, "that you will not object to telling me why you have had me brought here. What is it that you want of me?"

"You shall have it straight," he replied.

"Your mother and I have long been anxious that you should make a respectable and proper marriage, and we had picked out the right sort of a husband for you, when you got entangled with a roving Yankee."

"Whom you basely murdered!" broke in Rose.

His face was livid with anger, if not with another emotion.

"You had better be careful what you say, girl. There is a limit to my patience. The husband we had picked out for you was your cousin, Manuel Vincente, who still loves you dearly, and a strong point in his favor is that he is not a Yankee."

Rose's lip curled scornfully.

"But you ran away like a wild heifer," continued Rosalba, "and in course of time this good Manuel went to search for you, following your silly step-brother."

"Did Benito leave the ranch?" eagerly asked Rose.

"Yes; I have got rid of that nuisance. The young fool went to look for you, I suppose."

"But I found you, when the hunchback had failed," said Manuel. "I was sure that I had found you, cousin Rose, when I surprised you in San Francisco, though you slipped away from me so shrewdly. You ought to reward my devotion."

"You are no cousin of mine!" passionately exclaimed Rose. "You can claim no kinship with me, and I despise and detest you!"

"But you shall marry him, all the same," said Rosalba. "There are to be no more airs, and no more high-stepping ways. You shall marry Manuel Vincente, and it is for that purpose that you have been brought here."

"Now I understand you fully," said Rose, "and now I know what I must meet. I will never marry him, and you can never force me to."

"We will see about that, my girl. Tomorrow you will sing another song. Then you shall be married to suit me. Whether you consent or not, there shall be a good enough mar-

riage to suit my purposes. Now, Manuel, I will ride to the ranch and inform the senora of our splendid success. In the morning I will send Padre Sarza to you, with exact instructions as to what he is to do. Be sure that you keep a good watch, and don't fail to tie that show fellow securely."

Pedro Rosalba went away, and Rose felt relieved by his absence and by the knowledge of the respite that had necessarily been allowed her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A CASE OF FITS.

AFTER the departure of Pedro Rosalba, Manuel and his companions, who were well supplied with provisions, prepared their supper, and invited the prisoners to partake.

Rose Warren and Parmenas Pratt did not allow their appetites to be affected by their situation, and duly fortified themselves with the food that was set before them. They also slept as well as their hard couches would permit them to, though his bound limbs made every position uncomfortable to the ex-showman.

In the morning Manuel waited vainly for Pedro Rosalba and the priest he had promised to send.

Neither of them put in an appearance. In their place came a messenger from Rosalba with the information that Padre Sarza was absent, having been suddenly called away to a distant camp. Rosalba sent word that he would endeavor to find a person to take the place of the absent priest, and would bring him to the old mine as soon as possible.

Manuel cursed his luck, and Rose thanked God that the time of her trial had been again put off.

The morning hours passed slowly, and neither Pedro Rosalba nor any other person put in an appearance.

Manuel, who had all along been impatient, began to grow furiously angry. He made no attempt to confine his wrath, but let it flow forth freely in conversation with his companions.

"Uncle Pedro is a coward," he said. "He is willing that we should all run our necks into a noose, but is afraid to show up when there is the least chance of danger to himself."

The others were decidedly of the same opinion, and the impression seemed to prevail that the Mexican was shamefully leaving them in the lurch.

This impression was naturally pleasing to the prisoners, as every respite increased the chances that something might turn up in their favor.

At last Manuel was so far overcome by his impatience that he decided to do something. So he took two of the band, and sallied out, as he said, to do a little foraging on his own hook.

He did not happen to know that at that time Pedro Rosalba was a prisoner in his own house, where a close search was being made without the formality of a search warrant, and that enough was found to connect him with the robbery of the office of the Death Gulch Mining Company.

Within half an hour Manuel and his two companions returned in high glee, bringing with them a man who had the appearance of a clergyman.

"We're all right now," exclaimed Manuel, as he led this gentleman down to the large chamber that was lighted by a fire. "I can give uncle Pedro points, and beat him every time. Here's a preacher, and now we will finish up the business right away."

Rose directed an appealing glance at the alleged preacher, and he answered her with a slight twitch of his upper lip and a faint wink of his left eye. He had the look of a gentleman, and she could not suppose that he would willingly lend himself to the base designs of Manuel Vincente.

"This is the lady, parson," said Manuel.

"My name is Wesley Ryder," remarked that individual.

"Very well, Mr. Ryder. She and I are the ones that are to be married, and the sooner the job is done, the better."

"I desire to say to you, sir," said Rose, addressing herself to Ryder, and pointing at Manuel, "that I do not wish to marry that person, and I do not mean to marry him. I am well aware, too, that if any ceremony of marriage should be performed against my consent, it would be a sham, and void in law."

"There seems to be an obstacle here," quietly remarked Ryder.

"It is no obstacle at all," replied Manuel.

"All you've got to do is to go ahead."

"But I feel it to be my duty to say that I agree with the young lady's view of the law."

"I don't care a cuss for the law. And this is no place or time for any high-flown ideas of duty, either. Just you go right ahead and marry us, and I will look after the consequences."

"As a matter of right and consistency, Mr. Vincente—"

"Don't give me any talk about right and consistency! I am not in the humor for any fooling. Here is a good sum in gold for you as

soon as you finish the ceremony, or a bullet for you if you refuse to do the job, and you may take your choice."

"There seems to be no choice for me in that, and I suppose I must go on. Have the kindness to stand up with the lady. Your name, I believe, is Manuel Vincente. What is her name?"

"Rose Warren."

Rose was astonished, not at the brutality of her cousin-in-law, but at the weakness and lack of nerve of the alleged clergyman.

"Do you really mean to say, sir," she began, "that you, a minister of the gospel—"

But a great change had come over Ryder—a change that riveted the gaze of all present upon him.

His body swayed as he stood there, and he reeled like a drunken man, his arms extended, and his hands grasping at the air.

His face turned ashy pale, and its muscles contracted until the contortions were hideous. His lips were blue, he was foaming at the mouth, and his eyeballs rolled wildly in their sockets.

"He's got a fit!" exclaimed one of the men.

This man and another one ran to his assistance; but, before they could reach him, he fell heavily upon the hard floor of the mine.

Rose shrieked as she thought that he was about to fall into the fire; but that danger was avoided, and he dropped near it. There he lay in a heap, seemingly without sense or the power of motion.

"This is the cursedest luck of all," said Manuel. "Just when everything was ready. Do you understand fits, Jim Brady? What can we do for him?"

"Jest nothin' at all but wait till he comes out of it," replied Brady.

"How long will that take?"

"Can't say fur sartin. I've knowed some of 'em to be laid out for hours on a stretch."

"Thunderation! Do all you can for him Jim. It is of the greatest importance that he should be brought to his senses as soon as possible."

There was a quizzical look on Parmenas Pratt's face, as if he fancied himself to be "death on fits," but it was not his cue to afford any aid to the enemy, and it was evident that the blow that struck down Wesley Ryder had given relief to Rose Warren.

Jim Brady did all he could do; but he was not a fit doctor, and the stricken man still lay on the rocky floor, stretched out as if in death, but giving evidence of existence by his stertorous breathing and the occasional twitching of his limbs.

"This is too infernal bad!" exclaimed Manuel Vincente, with an oath. "Strange that the cursed idiot couldn't find any time but this to take a fit. Something is always happening to upset my plans. I wonder what has become of uncle Pedro. He ought to have been here long ago with a priest or somebody. If he leaves me in the lurch I will know how to make him suffer for it."

Pedro Rosalba still failed to put in an appearance, and Wesley Ryder still lay insensible on the rocky floor, and Manuel's wrath kept increasing until it rose to a white heat.

"I mean to have revenge upon somebody," he said at last. "Here, Moreno, you and two others take that show fellow outside and attend to him."

"What is it that we are to do?" asked Moreno.

"Do what Senor Rosalba told you to do. You don't mean to say that you have forgotten that? When you have settled his case come back and report."

"What do you mean to do?" asked Rose, as two men laid hands on Parmenas Pratt. "I hope you are not going to harm that gentleman merely because he is a friend of mine. What wrong has he ever done you?"

"Plenty of wrong," replied Manuel. "It was he who persuaded my uncle and aunt to go to see his cursed show, and then he put up some lying pictures that were meant to drive them crazy. I don't know who backed him in that; but he was responsible for it, and uncle Pedro hates him, and we mean to get even with him, if with nobody else."

The three men dragged Pratt away, and Rose sat down and wept.

Half an hour passed, and the man in a fit opened his eyes, sat up, and looked wildly around.

"Where am I?" he asked. "What does this mean? What has happened?"

"You have had a fit, and have been laid out here for ever so long," replied Manuel, hastening to his side.

"Yes, I suppose so. I am subject to fits. Excitement is apt to bring them on."

"You shouldn't get excited, then, especially when there is important business to attend to. How do you feel now? Are you ready to go on with that ceremony?"

"Not yet. There is something the matter with my head, and I am very weak. Let me rest."

Ryder dropped back on the floor of the mine again, and fell into a state of seeming insensibility.

"This is too cursed bad," said Manuel. "I

would like to know how long it is going to last. Give him some whisky, Jim, and try to bring him to time."

Jim Brady put his flask to Ryder's lips, and tried to force some liquor into his mouth; but the effort was a failure.

"You'll have to let him lie thar till he gits over it," said Brady. "Thar ain't anythin' else to do that I know of."

Manuel paced the dark chamber impatiently, muttering to himself, and occasionally ejecting an oath.

Rose Warren remained seated, with her hands clasped, and the expression of her face showed that she was wondering. Wondering at the providential occurrences that had given her respite after respite, and wondering what doom was intended for her faithful friend, Parmenas Pratt.

So the time passed, slowly but surely. Night settled down upon the outside world, but there was no change in the interior of the abandoned mine.

Manuel Vincente came to the fire, and gazed gloomily into the failing embers. Some of his comrades were snoring, and others were nodding.

"I can't stand this any longer," he said. "Something must be done. Where are Moreno and those two men? They ought to have come back long ago. They have had plenty of time to settle that fellow's case."

"It is settled!"

Flame and smoke flashed up from the fire, as if gunpowder had been thrown upon it.

Manuel started back, and saw Parmenas Pratt standing before him, with a cocked revolver in his hand.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NUMBER THREE

THE astonishment of Manuel Vincente was complete, and he stared open-eyed at the man before him.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed, with an oath.

"How did you get here? What does this mean?"

"It means," calmly replied Pratt, "that the game is played out, and that you have lost."

The voice was not that of a ghost, and the cocked revolver could not be mistaken for anything unearthly. It was unquestionably the ex-showman who had appeared there so mysteriously; but he was only one man, and there were large odds against him.

"Hi! you fellows!" roared Manuel. "Wake up, and look alive!"

A hand was laid heavily on his shoulder. He turned, and found himself face to face with Wesley Ryder, who grasped the collar of his coat firmly with his left hand, while with his right he pressed the muzzle of a pistol against his forehead.

"If you utter another word," said the clerical gentleman, "or if either of those men lifts a finger, off goes the top of your head!"

The Mexican's comrades, thoroughly aroused, had started up at the sound of his voice; but they fell back before the sight that presented itself to their gaze.

Besides Pratt and Ryder, they were faced by ten men who had arisen as if from the rock.

Each of these ten men was clothed in green, and each wore a green mask, and nothing could be clearer than the fact that they had "the drop" on their antagonists.

"The Green Guard, thank God!" exclaimed Rose, who had as a matter of habit dropped her veil some time before, but could easily see what sort of succor had arrived so opportunely.

Manuel Vincente, dazed and speechless, was quickly bound, and his comrades were disarmed and guarded.

"Now, Mr. Pratt," said the leader of the Green Guard, "you will take this lady back to Warneton as soon as possible. You will find horses outside. If this gentleman,"—bowing to Ryder—"will accompany you, you will have a sufficient escort."

"Perhaps a word of explanation," suggested Ryder—

"Pardon me, sir, but nothing of the kind is needed. Please go at once, as we have some business with these men that does not admit of delay."

Parmenas Pratt gave his arm to Rose, and led her up the dark ascent, followed by Wesley Ryder.

An hour after the event last recorded ten members of the Green Guard were grouped near the edge of Death Gulch, close to the hangman's tree that stretched an ominous arm out over the fearful chasm.

Again the moon shone upon them, and again one man stood in the midst of the group of dark forms, bound, and with a rope around his neck.

This time the victim was Manuel Vincente. He was no longer confident audacious, or in any degree self-possessed.

His boldness had wilted like a frosted leaf, and his manhood had shrunk like a wind-bag that is punctured.

He was standing face to face with death, and he knew it.

He showed that knowledge in his pale face, his quivering lips, his trembling limbs, and the

broken and abject tones in which he pleaded for mercy.

"For God's sake, don't hang me!" he begged. "What have I done to deserve such a death? How have I ever harmed any of you? I have committed no crime."

"You lie, Manuel Vincente!" rung out the clear tones of the leader of the Green Guard.

"It is easy to tell me that I lie; but how are you going to prove it? You can't prove anything against me, except the little game that I was caught at, and that hurt nobody."

The nephew of Pedro Rosalba had never looked uglier or more despicable than at that moment.

"You lie, Manuel Vincente!" repeated the leader of the Green Guard. "You are guilty of robbery and murder. You helped to rob the office of the Death Gulch Mining Company. If you did not help in the act, you helped to plan the crime. You helped to waylay the stage on the Bluffton road, when better men than you were shot down and murdered. You are guilty of a foul murder that was committed on the very spot where you now stand."

"It is a lie!" howled Manuel.

"Look around you. Do you know this place. I see that you know it well. Right here, in the darkness of night, four men held in their hands one man, bound and helpless, and flung him to his death into that fearful abyss."

"That is none of my business. I know nothing about that."

"You lie again, Manuel Vincente. Two of the men who were guilty of that cowardly crime have swung from that tree, and you are Number Three!"

The Mexican writhed and twisted in a vain effort to free himself from his bonds, and would have sunk upon the ground if he had not been held up by two men.

"It is a false charge," he said, moaning rather than speaking. "How are you going to prove it?"

"By the man you threw into the Gulch, and I am that man!" said the leader of the Green Guard, as he pulled off his mask, and stepped up to the doomed prisoner.

Manuel Vincente shrieked as the rope tightened around his neck.

The next moment he was swinging over the dark abyss from the solitary tree, and on his breast there was a paper with the inscription "Number Three."

The men in green silently rode away from the fatal spot, and left him hanging there alone.

When Rose Warren emerged from the abandoned mine into the outer air, Parmenas Pratt felt her hand tremble as it rested on his arm.

"Are you cold?" he asked.

"Not at all."

"But you seemed to shiver. I am afraid that the scenes you have passed through to day have been too trying for your nerves."

"My nerves never worry me, Mr. Pratt. As for what we have passed through, all's well that ends well, and we are safely out of that scrape. That is not what agitates me. It is a voice. Who is the man who directed you to take me home—the leader of the Green Guard? He knows you, and you must know him. Who is he?"

"That is hardly a fair question," replied Pratt. "It must be clear to you that the Green Guard is a secret organization, like the bands that are called regulators in some parts of the country, and vigilantes in others; but this appears to me to be more of a private affair. It is possible that its members, in punishing the guilty, may make themselves liable to the law. Therefore, as you see, they are disguised, and it would not be proper for me to tell the name of their leader, if I should know it."

"That is well argued, sir; but the argument does not satisfy me. The leader is the same man who came to our rescue when the Little Ruby was attacked. Is he the same man who employed you to make those Death Gulch pictures at your exhibition?"

"Beg pardon, Miss Rosina; but you are supposing that I was employed to do that."

"Of course I am. Can you deny it?"

They had been so absorbed in this conversation as they rode along, that they had forgotten the presence of Wesley Ryder, who was following them closely. When Pratt found himself so hardly pressed, he sought to change the subject by calling Rose's attention to their companion.

"Where is our clergyman?" he asked. "We are leaving him out in the cold."

"I am close at hand," replied that gentleman, "and I have a word to say. I wish to remove two wrong impressions from the mind of this young lady. I am not a clergyman, and I never had a fit in my life."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Rose.

"Exactly so. In spite of my solemn appearance, I am not even a member of any church. While I was taking a walk I was captured by those scoundrels. Perhaps they would not have taken me so easily, if they had not excited my curiosity. I wanted to find out what was going on."

"And you did find out."

"I did, indeed, and it was highly interesting to me. When the crisis came I took a fit for the purpose of gaining time, as I wanted to think the matter over and prepare a plan to get you out of their clutches."

"Your fit was a great relief to me, Mr. Ryder, and I am deeply grateful to you."

"Oh, it was little that I did, and that sort of thing is my business. At least, it is in my line. Perhaps I might have done something, if I had not received such unexpected aid. Now I would like to know, if this gentleman can tell me, where that aid came from, and how he happened to turn up there."

"You have heard us speak of the Green Guard," said Pratt. "They were out on business, and were searching for this lady. Her aunt, Mrs. Outram, had become alarmed by her absence, and sent word to Death Gulch, to an influential person there. That caused the Green Guard to turn out. In the course of their search they met a man who had followed you from the Right Bower for the purpose, as I guess, of making a raid on your pockets. He had witnessed your capture, and told them all about it. Then they went on, and happened to fall in with me."

"How was that?" asked Ryder. "How did you get clear of those men who took you out?"

"I hadn't got clear of them at all. They had taken me out and tied me to a tree. I can't be sure whether they meant to kill me or not; but they had half stripped me, and had cut some sticks that made me shiver when I looked at them. However, the Green Guard came along and put a stop to that game, and I was glad enough to pilot them to the old mine. As Vincente's men had let their fire go down, and were keeping no sort of a guard, it was easy enough for us to steal in unobserved, and there we were."

"And here we are now," said Rose, "and we are thankful that we are here, and I hope to be able to prove my gratitude to both of you."

At the edge of Warneton Wesley Ryder took leave of his two companions.

"You are safe now, and I will bid you good-night," he said.

"I would be glad to see more of you, Mr. Ryder," said Rose. "You will find me at the Lincoln House in Warneton."

"You will be sure to hear from me, Miss Warren, and will probably see me soon."

Rose was most warmly welcomed by Mrs. Outram, who shed tears of joy, and declared that she could never, never trust her out of her auntie's sight again.

"But this is the last of my scrapes, auntie dear," said Rose. "I will be safe enough after this."

"How can you say that, Rose? You cannot possibly be sure that you are safe."

But she felt sure of it the next morning, when Parmenas Pratt informed her that another man had been found hanging from the solitary tree at the edge of Death Gulch; that the man was Manuel Vincente, and that on his breast was a paper with the inscription "Number Three."

"Number Three!" exclaimed Rose. "There is but one other, and I know who will be Number Four. The ways of Providence are wonderful, and nothing is impossible. There was but one man who could have that knowledge, and there is but one man who has that power. Do not speak to me, Mr. Pratt, I am thinking. Through the darkness I see a great light. For some time it has been spreading and growing, and I believe it will burst upon me at last, in all its fullness and glory."

CHAPTER XXIX.

SURPRISES.

At the office of the Death Gulch Mining Company appeared Wesley Ryder, and inquired for Benito Rosalba.

His clerical appearance drew attention to him at once.

"Take the gentleman up-stairs to Mr. Rosalba," said Buck Farley, and Ryder was ushered into the handsomely furnished room in which Benito sat alone.

The young hunchback rose to receive him, and his greeting showed that Ryder was a more than welcome visitor.

"Here you are at last!" said Benito. "I have been here several days waiting for you; but I have learned that you were in the neighborhood."

"Indeed! How did you find that out?"

"I heard of some of your performances yesterday, and I knew that you had been captured and taken to the abandoned New Ophir mine, to perform a marriage ceremony for my cousin, Manuel Vincente."

"Of course, then, you know that Manuel Vincente is dead."

"Yes, and his death does not grieve me. You know that I had no affection for him, and I know that he deserved the death he died. Let him pass, and tell me the news. I suppose that you have been as unsuccessful in your search for my sister as I have been."

"We will come to that directly. Do you know who the young lady was, to whom your cousin wished me to marry him?"

"Yes. It was a speculating young lady, named Rosina, who owns the Little Ruby mine. I suppose he wanted to marry her for her money."

"He might well have wanted to marry her for her beauty, to say nothing of her other splendid points. Have you ever seen her, Mr. Rosalba?"

"No. I have been here but a little while, and I do not take much interest in young ladies."

"I believe that you will take a lively interest in this one. My friend, that speculating young lady, named Rosina, who owns the Little Ruby mine, and whom Manuel Vincente wanted to force into a marriage with him, is your step-sister, Rose Warren?"

Benito jumped up, his face blazing with excitement.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed.

"It is true, all the same. I have found her, and the search is at an end."

"How can you know this, Mr. Ryder? You never saw my sister."

"Not before yesterday; but I saw her then."

"Are you sure?"

"As sure as I am that I sit here. Your cousin said that her name was Rose Warren, and she did not deny it. I addressed her by that name when I took leave of her last night. Oh, there is no doubt of it. You have been blind. Could you not guess that it must be your sister whom Manuel Vincente was so anxious to marry? Now don't get into a flurry," continued Ryder, seeing that Benito was trembling with excitement. "Hold your horses, and go easy. She is safe in Warneton, and is not likely to run away."

"You are right," said Benito. "I must be calm for her sake, if not for my own. I am crazy to see her, but must first tell the news to those who have so kindly aided me in my search. Will you have the kindness to step down-stairs and request Mr. Farley to come up here?"

When the Bonanza Prince entered the room, he saw the young man pacing the floor excitedly, and knew that he had heard something of importance.

"What is the matter, Benito?" he asked.

"Mr. Farley, it is wonderful. I hardly know how to tell you."

"Be calm, my lad, and take your time for telling it."

"Were you not the leader of the Green Guard, sir, when Manuel Vincente was captured?"

"Yes, and I recognize the man who came up here as one who did good service at that time."

"Do you know the lady whom Vincente was trying to force into a marriage?"

"I do not know her, but I know of her. She calls herself Rosina, and has for some time been a speculator in mining stocks and the like. Yes, I know of her, and I know nothing against her."

"I should hope that you do not. You rescued her from those scoundrels last night; you rescued her from Pedro Rosalba's gang when they pounced on the Little Ruby mine; you rescued her from the robbers who attacked the Warneton stage; you came to her assistance when she was swamped by the New Ophir speculation; you have been in her presence again and again; yet you did not know who she was."

"How should I?" asked Farley. "She was always closely veiled. If she chose to conceal her identity, I ought to be too much of a gentleman to try to uncover it."

"Mr. Farley, that lady is my sister, Rose Warren."

"Benito!"

The young man was astonished at the effect his words produced upon his benefactor. Buck Farley sunk into a chair, his frame quivering with excitement, his face flushed, and his breath coming in gasps.

"My dear sir!" exclaimed Benito, running to him. "What is the matter? Are you going to be ill? Shall I call for help?"

"No, my lad," replied Farley, feebly at first, but regaining his strength as he spoke. "It is only a sort of spasm, and will be over presently. Give me a drop of brandy from the buffet there. Thank you, Benito. You are a good young man, and you deserve the happiness that has been so long deferred. I am subject to these attacks. Excitement brings them on, and you had worked me up to a high pitch of expectation."

"I am sorry, Mr. Farley."

"There is nothing to make you sorry, everything to make you glad. Are you sure that the lady is your sister?"

"Mr. Ryder, who was here just now, is 'the man who was helping me search for her. He says that there can be no doubt of it.'"

"Thank God for all His mercies! As I have told you, Benito, money cannot do everything. Here have I been for so long a time in reach of your sister, and have not known that it was she. I was sure that she could be found, but would never have thought of looking for her in that guise."

"She has had brain and will enough, Mr. Farley, to make her way in the world."

"No doubt of that. You must be anxious to see her, Benito, and I will not hinder you. Better ride over to Warneton at once. But I shall want to visit her also, and you may expect me to be following you shortly."

"She will be glad to see you, sir, to thank you for all you have done for her."

"As for that, I have been working in my own interest. Tell your friend Ryder to make himself comfortable. He shall be well rewarded for his search and his discovery. Hurry off, Benito!"

The young man had hardly ridden away from the office when Buck Farley sent a pressing message to his partner, who speedily joined him in the room which Benito had lately left.

"What is the matter, my son?" he asked, observing that Farley was pacing the floor, with his eyes fixed on the carpet. "I hope there is no more bad news."

"Nothing but good news, my dear friend, the best of news."

"I hope it is not about Pedro Rosalba. I am not vindictive, Farley—that is, I am no longer so. I don't object to anything you have done or intend to do; but I would really rather not hear of the death of that man."

Buck Farley took the old man by both his hands, and looked him earnestly in the face.

"It is not news of death that I am to tell you," he said. "It is news of life. You know that we have been searching for Rose Warren."

"Is it news of her? You say that it is news of life. She must be alive, then."

"Yes; she is alive."

"And you have found her?"

"No."

John Warne's face fell.

"How can you treat me so, Farley?" he asked. "You lift me up only to knock me down. What do you mean?"

"I have not found her, old friend; but she is found. She is safe and well, and is here. Not in this building, but near here. You have met her, but have not known her. It was she who was saved from the clutches of Manuel Vincente last night."

"Ah! the scoundrel! He did deserve to die."

"She is Rosina, the owner of the Little Ruby mine, and she is now in Warneton. Can you bear to see her?"

"Well, my boy, I have borne much sorrow in my time, and I believe I can stagger under a load of joy. Let us go at once."

CHAPTER XXX.

A GREAT LIGHT.

ROSE WARREN sat at her window in the hotel at Warneton, looking out at the street, as if she were expecting some one. She wore no veil, and her countenance was unusually serene.

"What makes you so restless, Rose?" asked Mrs. Outram.

"Why, auntie, how can you ask such a question, when I am sitting here as still as a statue, and you are hopping about the room as if the floor was hot?"

"I am worrying about you, my dear."

"You need worry about me no more. It is a long time since I have felt such a sense of peace and safety as I now feel. Auntie, you have often said that you would like to have that heavy veil of mine for a scarf. You may have it now. I shall never wear it again."

"Are you sure of that, dear child?"

"Quite sure and very glad."

"Then you must be sure that you are safe, or that there are people about here who know who you really are."

"I am sure of both of those points, auntie. As Manuel Vincente is dead, my greatest danger no longer threatens me. As Pedro Rosalba knows who I am, it matters not who else knows it."

"Does it not matter at all, Rose? That man, whose voice touched you so strangely—the leader of the Green Guard—did he see your face last night?"

"No, auntie."

"How was that?"

"You know that it has got to be such a habit with me to keep my veil down, that it is almost a second nature, and I suppose I dropped it unawares. And there was no reason why I should show my face to him or any other man."

"As the Green Guard has done so much for you, Rose, you might have been a little more liberal. Have you found out yet who he is?"

"No, auntie. I have not found out, but I know."

"You have not found out, but you know? What a strange way you have of talking! Who is he, then?"

"Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince."

"Why do you think so?"

"I just put this and that together. You sent word to Mr. Farley at Death Gulch, and the Green Guard came to my rescue. That is one reason, and I have others. But it is not worth while to argue the point, auntie. We shall know before long, as I have a presentiment that he will be here to-day."

"A presentiment! Why, Rose, you are getting to be so queer."

"I am glad to have that kind of queerness."

Hark, auntie! Some one is coming up toward our room. Perhaps it is he?"

It was a waiter, who knocked at the door, and was admitted by Mrs. Outram.

"A gentleman to see Miss Rosina."

"Who is it?" she eagerly asked.

Mrs. Outram read from the card that was handed to her, "Benito Rosalba."

"My brother! My dear little brother!" exclaimed Rose. "Send him up at once."

Benito had come up at the heels of the waiter, and the next moment Rose had him folded in a close and long embrace.

"Why, you big fellow!" she said, holding him off to take a good look at him. "How tall you have got to be! And you have almost outgrown your hump. But you could never grow out of my heart, dear Benito. How did you know that I was here?"

"Mr. Ryder told me—the man who looked so much like a clergyman. I had employed him to search for you, and you know how he found you."

"They tell me, Benito, that you left the ranch, and followed me off."

"Yes, sister; I have been seeking you a long time; but it was only lately that I was able to begin a proper search. I drifted back here, and was kindly taken into the office of Farley & Warne. I told them my story, and they offered to help me find you. They supplied me with unlimited money, and have been wonderfully kind."

"I am sure of that, and I know that I owe them much. It is no wonder that you could not find me, Benito, as I was far from here, and I kept myself disguised as well as I could. I was afraid of your father and his nephew, and dared not even let you know where I was, for fear that they would find me. Manuel Vincente did find me in San Francisco, and here he found me again."

"He is dead now, sister."

"I know it. Thanks to the Green Guard, I have no longer any fear of him. Tell me, Benito, is not your friend, Mr. Farley, the leader of the Green Guard?"

"That is a secret, sister; but I believe I may tell you that he is."

"I knew it. I am anxious to see him."

"You will see him shortly. He told me he would follow me here."

"I know it, Benito, I must show you my dear auntie, who has been waiting so patiently to speak to you."

While Benito was making the acquaintance of Mrs. Outram, and he and Rose were recounting their various experiences, a waiter brought the information that Mr. Buchanan Farley was below, wishing to see "Miss Rosina."

"Show him up," said Rose, striving to compose herself for the interview which she almost dreaded while she intensely longed for it.

The Bonanza Prince was not so hasty as Benito had been; but he shortly entered the room, and glanced quickly at Rose, whose face was averted from him at the moment.

"I have called to see Miss Rose Warren," he said.

His words added a flush to her face and a light to her eyes as she turned toward him. But who was that tall and fine-looking man with the heavy beard? She must not act upon impulse alone. Had the "great light" of which she had spoken really dawned?

"Rose!" he exclaimed, and there was no mistaking the voice, the air, the gesture.

"Edward!" she answered, and they met at last.

"It is indeed you," she said. "It is impossible, but it is true. Were you actually thrown into Death Gulch?"

"I was, and was miraculously preserved. But that is a long story, to which you may listen when we have more leisure."

"God has given you back to me. At least He has given you back, and I hope it is to me that He has given you. I could not live if I should lose you now."

"I am entirely yours, Rose, as I have always been. But there is another here, waiting impatiently to see you, who has a better right to your love and duty than I have."

"A better right, Edward? What can you mean?"

"An older right, at least. You once had a father."

"Yes, and he was very dear to me; but I lost him when I was a child. He disappeared many years ago, and they told me that he was dead. Is he not dead?"

"No. He, too, was thrown into Death Gulch by Pedro Rosalba, and he, too, was miraculously preserved. He is now the elder partner in the firm of Farley & Warne, and he is waiting for me to call him up here."

"Oh, call him up! Call him up at once!"

It was not necessary to call John Warne. He had quietly followed his partner up-stairs, and had been listening at the door, and there he stood, trembling with eagerness.

The next moment his daughter was folded in his arms, and his tears of joy were falling on her head.

"Would you have known me?" she asked, as she lifted up her happy eyes to his face.

"Known you, my child? Of course I would not. I left you a little Gipsy of a girl, and I find you a tall and splendid woman. I need not ask you if you would have known me."

"But I would have known you," Rose declared. "That is, I know you very well now, and am sure that you are my own dear father. I have never forgotten you, and you have not changed so very much."

"And now, my dear child," said the old man, "I ask nothing more of this world. There is nothing more that it can give me. I am restored to you, and I need live but a little longer to see you united to a man who would be fully worthy of you if you were the best of created beings. I have seen him tried in many ways, and I know him to be as good as gold and as true as steel. If it had not been for him, I would never have met you again in this world."

"I formed a pretty good opinion of him some time ago," remarked Rose, with a blush. "Speaking of good people, you would have to go far to find a better than my dear auntie here, Mrs. Outram, who will be glad to know you both. If it had not been for her, I would have perished on the plain shortly after I ran away from Pedro Rosalba, and she has been more than a mother to me ever since."

Mrs. Outram's kindly face spoke for her as well as Rose's words, and the two men overwhelmed her with assurances of their gratitude, which she declared she did not deserve, as Rose had been far more to her than she could have been to Rose.

"The name of Outram is a familiar one to me," said Buck Farley. "A sister of my mother's married a man named Outram. Her name was Margaret Helmsley."

"That's me!" exclaimed Mrs. Outram. "My sister Louise married Andrew Dorlon; but they both died far away from me, and I understood that they left no children."

"There was one boy, aunt Margaret, who has lived and knocked about the world, and is very glad to find you at last."

"This is too bad," said Rose. "You must not take my auntie away from me."

"I will not. She shall be your auntie as well as mine, as soon as you are willing to make her so."

"As I could never bear to lose her, it must be as you say. Now you see, auntie, that my prophecy has come true. I said that my troubles were at an end, and that I would soon see a great light."

"Had you believed, then, that I was living?" asked the Bonanza Prince.

"Not until very lately; but for some time I had been wondering and doubting. When Pedro Rosalba was ruined in the New Ophir speculation, and I was saved, I felt that some agency was at work against him. When I was rescued from the road-agents, I felt that some power was protecting me. When those pictures were shown at Mr. Pratt's exhibition, I wondered who it could be that knew so much. When those scoundrels who threw you into Death Gulch met their fate, one after one, I wondered yet more. When I saw you out here in the street, your form and air sent a strange hope to my heart. When I heard your voice at the Little Ruby mine, it thrilled me through and through. All this time my wonder and hope had been growing, and last night your voice made me almost certain; but it was not until the death of Number Three that I really knew who you were. Can it be, now, that you have been doing so much for me, and have not guessed that it was I whom you were helping?"

"I must confess that I never guessed it. When I first heard of you, in that New Ophir affair, I felt that I owed you something, and you were a woman, and your name reminded me of Rose. But I have been pursuing my own ends, which happened to work in your favor. I felt sure that I would find you when the proper time came."

The Bonanza Prince told the story of his escape from death, and of the deliverance of himself and Rose's father from Death Gulch. He showed how the discoveries made there had brought fortune to both of them, and declared that he had been merely an instrument in the hand of Providence for the punishment of men who were guilty of the basest of crimes.

"A willing instrument, my son," said his partner. "However, I went as far as you went, and am equally responsible with you. But we may stop now. There is one left, and that one the worst of all; but we have had enough. Let there be no Number Four!"

"I am satisfied," replied Farley. "I shall not pursue Pedro Rosalba any further. But I believe that he will get his deserts."

CHAPTER XXXI.

"WHO WILL BE NUMBER FOUR?"

WHEN Pedro Rosalba reached his ranch, after his unsuccessful attempt to find Padre Sarza, he told his wife of the great success he and Manuel had made in the capture of Rose.

"It is a bit of bad luck that Sarza is away just now," he said, the next day; "but I will soon settle that matter. There is an Irish

priest near Warneton who is strongly bound to me, and I will get him. Have dinner put on the table while I send a messenger to Manuel, and when I have eaten I will go to this padre Gallagher. In the mean time, the girl is safe."

They had hardly finished their dinner, which was not an abundant one, when a visitor arrived, and was ushered into the room where they were seated.

He was a tall man, of respectable appearance, and was a stranger to Rosalba, who invited him to be seated, and inquired his name and business.

"My name is Morris," said the stranger. "and I have heard that you want to sell this property. I am ready to buy it if we can agree upon terms."

This was an offer at which the Mexican jumped eagerly, as affording him an exit from his embarrassments. But it would not do to be too hasty. Saying that he had no time to spare, he named his price.

"We will not quarrel about the figure, if you can give me a title," said Morris. "But I have heard that Buck Farley has a claim on the ranch."

"It's a lie!" said Rosalba. "When I heard that he claimed to have a deed, I pronounced it a forgery. Now I know that the claim was false, and that he has no such deed."

"Are you sure of that, Mr. Rosalba?"

"Yes, I am sure of it."

"Well, sir, as I have seen such a deed in Mr. Farley's possession, and as you are sure that he has not got it now, I suppose you can tell me where it is?"

"What do you mean by that, sir?"

Pedro Rosalba looked into the muzzle of a pistol, and saw that the meaning of his visitor was plain.

"I mean that you are my prisoner," replied Morris. "I have a warrant to search this house, issued by the Vigilance Committee of Death Gulch, and I mean to keep you quiet until the search is made."

"Help!" shouted Rosalba. "Jose! Santo! Jim! Come here quick!"

In response to his appeal two strangers, with drawn revolvers, entered the room.

"Your bravos and servants are all under guard," said Morris. "You see that we mean business. As you seem disposed to make a disturbance, you must be tied."

As this order was being executed, Senora Rosalba ran to the assistance of her husband, declaring that he should not be tied.

"You had better be quiet, madam," said Morris, "or we will be obliged to tie you also, and that would be an unpleasant duty."

Pedro Rosalba was bound to his chair, and the search was begun.

It was a long and tedious proceeding, though the searchers were numerous enough. The building was gone through systematically, and every room, closet, corner, and article of furniture was searched, while Pedro Rosalba regarded the proceedings with gloomy and threatening looks, and his wife protested sharply and angrily.

Finally Morris came in with a bundle of papers, containing Henry Warren's deed to Buck Farley, and some other documents that had been taken from the office of the Death Gulch Mining Company.

"I have found what I was looking for," he said, showing the bundle to Rosalba. "Here is the deed I was speaking of. It and the other papers were stolen property, and have been found in this house. You may explain how you got possession of them, if you care to."

The Mexican replied that he knew nothing about them, and had no explanation to make.

"Well, sir, I have no authority to go any further in this matter—"

Rosalba's face brightened.

"But I have just been informed of some more of your devilry that is on foot, and have been notified to keep you here safely until morning."

Rosalba's hope faded away. This new turn in the game would prevent the fulfillment of his promise to Manuel, which had already been too long delayed, and it threatened to ruin his plans.

But there was no remedy, as he was bound and a prisoner. He ate his supper with such appetite as he could muster, and went to bed, with a guard at the door of his bedroom.

In the morning he and his wife arose, and found nothing to hinder them from going about the house as they pleased. The emissaries from the Vigilance Committee of Death Gulch had silently departed, without any ceremony of leave-taking.

Pedro Rosalba mingled an abundance of curses with his morning drams, which were considerably heavier than usual, and announced his intention of going in search of Manuel.

"There is a chance that all may be right yet," said he, "unless this job of Manuel's is what that fellow spoke of when he said that he was going to keep me a prisoner through the night. If they have dropped on that, the game is up."

The household was demoralized, and his breakfast was very late, increasing his anger and impatience.

When he was at last ready to start, he was stopped by the arrival of a man whom he recognized immediately as one of the gang that he had left with Manuel.

This fellow, whose face told a story of disaster, was one of those who had been sent out to administer a thrashing to Parmenas Pratt, if not to kill him.

He briefly related the events that had transpired in the old mine, as far as he knew them, and told how the Green Guard had come upon himself and his comrades, releasing Pratt, and he alone had escaped.

"All is up, then!" exclaimed Rosalba. "Of course the show fellow led them into the mine, and Manuel is either dead or a prisoner. Come into the house, Alfonso, and tell your story to the senora."

Senora Rosalba was terribly stricken by this new blow, and her cries and complaints contrasted sharply with the silent despair of her husband.

"Are you going to let it end so?" she demanded, turning angrily upon him. "Do you mean to lie down like a whipped cur, and let those wretches ride over you? Will you not even go and look for Manuel?"

"I know where to look for Manuel," he gloomily replied. "There is but one place where he would be likely to be found. Mount your horse, Alfonso, and ride out to Death Gulch—you know the place I mean, where the solitary tree stands at the edge—and bring me word of what you find there."

It was quite a ride from the ranch to the Gulch, and it was late in the day when the Mexican returned.

His story could be read in his face even more plainly than when he met his master in the morning.

He had found a man hanging from the outreaching limb of the solitary tree. That man was Manuel Vincente, and on his breast was a paper inscribed "Number Three."

The fatal words struck terror to the heart of Pedro Rosalba, and his countenance assumed an expression of utter despair. The news was what he had expected; but it told too plainly of the fate that was gradually but surely overtaking him. The vengeance had seized Number Three; how soon would it strike Number Four?

Senora Rosalba stormed against fate and her foes until she was tired, and then turned her batteries upon her husband, accusing him of being a fool and a coward, who had ruined himself and her, and who was too faint-hearted to make an effort to avert the final disaster.

For once he declined to take part in a scolding match. The only answer she got was this: "Who will be Number Four?"

"It ought to be you, you wretched imbecile!" she replied.

"No," said Rosalba. "That shall never be. I will go to the Gulch now, and will cut down that tree, and then I shall be sure that no man will ever hang from it again!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

DEATH GULCH AGAIN.

WHEN her husband had gone, Senora Rosalba remained seated as he had left her, her head bowed upon her breast, and her arms lying idly in her lap, seeming to have fallen into a stupor.

She had passed half an hour or more in this condition, when she suddenly started up, aroused by the noise of new arrivals at the ranch.

The arrivals clearly numbered more than one; but only one person entered the room.

It was Benito, who bowed to her respectfully.

"Mother," he said, "I have come back."

"You are no son of mine," she retorted, glowering at him. "You are a disobedient, vile abortion. You have been in league with our enemies against your father and me, and I detest you. Get out of my sight!"

"I am not the only one who has come back," calmly continued Benito, "Rose is here. After a long search I have found her at last, and she is well and happy."

"May Satan blast her! She has been the cause of all our trouble, and at last of our ruin. Take her away and never let me see the face of either of you again!"

"There is yet another lost one who has been found. It is Edward Dorlon, whom we believed to be dead. He is now known as Buck Farley."

"I know it. Not even Death Gulch could kill that Yankee devil, and he has come back from the grave to worry and torture us. Last night he killed Manuel, and now he means to murder my husband."

The Bonanza Prince entered the room, with Rose on his arm.

"You are mistaken, madam," he said. "I shall not pursue you any further. I wish to see you and Senor Rosalba comfortably settled. I am about to marry your daughter, and am willing to make peace."

"May my curse rest upon you both! I want nothing from you. Let the devils who have been driving us do their worst!"

"There is another whom I can restore to you," said Farley. "Your husband, Henry Warren, was not killed when he was thrown into Death Gulch. I found him there, and he came out with me. He is known as John Warne, and he is here."

John Warne came in, and stood, smiling, at his daughter's side.

It needed but this to complete the wreck of Lucia Rosalba. She flew into a frenzy, and stormed like a fury, first at one, and then at another of her uninvited guests, but mainly at her husband, whom she cursed for a Yankee devil, and at Benito, whom she taunted with being a bastard.

Rose turned pale, and shuddered as she shrunk behind her lover.

"Do not be afraid," he said. "This fit will soon pass."

"You lie!" shrieked Senora Rosalba. "It will not pass; but I will pass, and I defy you to stop me. I leave this house to you, and my curse I leave with it. I am going to join my husband."

"Where is he?" asked Farley.

"He has gone to Number Three, and I am going to Number Four!"

She rushed frantically from the house, vaulted upon Rose's horse with an agility that could not have been expected from a person of her bulk, and dashed away at full gallop.

"She is crazy," said Farley. "We must follow her, old friend. Benito, stay here with your sister."

The two men were speedily mounted, and careering through the timber, across the brook, and over hills and down gullies, in pursuit of the flying woman; but her horse easily kept the lead, in spite of the weight he carried, and some supernatural instinct seemed to enable his rider to avoid all the obstacles that delayed her pursuers.

At the edge of Death Gulch stood a solitary man with an ax, chopping at the base of a solitary tree. From a long branch that hung over the chasm swung the body of a man at the end of a rope, and the tree was nearly ready to fall.

The galloping of a horse made the axman pause from his labor and look around.

He saw a large woman riding toward him with frantic gestures, urging to the top of his speed the horse that bore her.

Again and again his ax sunk into the tottering trunk.

As she leaped to the ground at his side, and her horse bounded away with a snort of terror, the hangman's tree quivered, bent, and toppled over into the abyss, the body that swung from the outreaching limb leading its fall.

"A brave deed, Pedro Rosalba," exclaimed the woman. "Now you have proved yourself ten times the coward that you are a fool. You have sent poor Manuel into the Gulch, and all you have left to do is to follow him."

"What do you mean, Lucetta?" he asked, his face turning ashy pale in the moonlight.

"I mean that you were too cowardly to take care of Manuel before you cut down that tree in the vain hope of saving your own life. I mean that you have ruined yourself and me, and have brought both the living and the dead down upon us. They are all at the ranch—Benito, Rose Warren, Edward Dorlon, and that infernal Yankee who was my husband."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Rosalba, as he leaned upon his ax to support his trembling limbs.

"Fine work you have done, you sneaking coward! I trusted to you to make an end of my enemies, and they all rise up to torture me. But they shall not have the satisfaction of killing you. That is the one joy that is left to me, and I, myself, shall count you Number Four!"

So excited were the two that they did not notice the clatter of hoofs on the stony ground as Buck Farley and John Warne galloped to the scene.

With a wild cry she rushed at him, and threw him over into the chasm.

"And I will be Number Five!" she shrieked, as she raised her arms above her head.

Before she could take the fatal plunge she intended, Buck Farley and John Warne had seized her and drawn her back from the abyss. It required the exertion of all their strength to subdue her, and they were obliged to tie her hand and foot before they could carry her back to the ranch.

She is now a hopeless lunatic, and an inmate of an insane asylum, where she never speaks of herself but as "Number Five."

The Bonanza Prince retained the name under which he had gained his fortune, and continued to prosper, his prosperity being aided and shared by his charming wife, formerly Rose Warren.

John Warne retired from active business, and his place in the firm was taken by Benito Rosalba, who was devoted to his step-sister and her husband.

Parmenas Pratt continued to act as manager, and soon became part owner of the Little Ruby mine, which "panned out" to meet the expectations of all concerned.

THE END.

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